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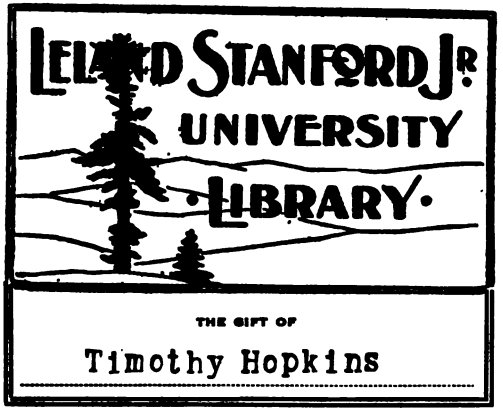
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BY

IMBERT DE SAINT-AMAND

TRANSLATED BY

ELIZABETH GILBERT MARTIN

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THE COURT OF LOUIS XV.

THE COURT OF LOUIS XV.

INTRODUCTION

IF you want romance, said M. Guizot one day, why not turn to history? The great author was right. The historical novel is out of fashion at present. People are tired of seeing celebrated people misrepresented, and they agree with Boileau that

"Nothing is so beautiful as the true, the true alone is lovely."

Are there, in fact, any inventions more striking than reality? Can any novelist, however ingenious, find more varied combinations or more interesting scenes than the dramas of history? Could the most fertile mind imagine any types so curious as, for example, the women of the court of Louis XV.? The eternal womanly, as Goethe said, is all there with its vices and virtues, its pettiness and its grandeur, its weakness and its strength, its egotism and its devotion. What an instructive gallery! What diverse figures, from such a saint as Madame Louise of France, the Carmelite, to Madame Dubarry, the courtesan! In the Countess de Mailly, we have

the modest favorite; in the Duchess de Châteauroux, the haughty favorite; in the Marquise de Pompadour, the intriguer, the female minister, the statesman; in Queen Marie Leczinska, the model of conjugal duty and fidelity; in the Dauphiness Marie Antoinette, the resplendent image of grace and youth, of poesy and purity; in the six daughters of the King, Madame the Infanta, so tender toward her father; Madame Henriette, her twin sister, who died of chagrin at twenty-four because she could not marry according to her inclination; Madame Adelaide and Madame Victoire, inseparable in adversity as well as in happier days; Madame Sophie, gentle and timid; Madame Louise, Amazon and Carmelite by turns, who cried in the delirium of her last agony: "To Paradise, quick, quick, to Paradise at full gallop!"

History is the resurrection of the dead, but this resurrection is not an easy matter. To withdraw one's self from the present in order to live in the past, to display characters, to make audible the words of all these personages who are sleeping their last sleep, to rekindle so many extinct flames, evoke so many vanished shades, is a work that would need the wand of a magician. History interests and impassions only when it penetrates the secret of souls. To make it a painting, in animated tones and warm colors, and not an insignificant monochrome, it is necessary that men and things should reappear as in a mirror that reflects the past.

The preservation of the palace where they passed their existence facilitates the renascence of the women of the court of Louis XV. It is something to be able to say: Here such an event was accomplished, such a remark uttered. Here such a personage rendered her last sigh. The sight of the rooms where so many dramas were unfolded is in itself a fruitful lesson. The theatre remains; the decorations are hardly changed. But this is not all. The dust must be shaken from the costumes; the actors and actresses must be hunted up; the play must begin anew.

There is no lack of materials for this work of reconstruction; they are even rather too abundant: memoirs by Duclos, Marais, Barbier, the Duke de Luynes, Maurepas, Villars, the Marquis d'Argenson, President Hénault, Madame du Hausset, Count de Ségur, Weber, Madame Campan; — histories by Voltaire, M. Henri Martin, Michelet, Jobez; — works by the brothers Goncourt, Sainte-Beuve, M. de Lescure, the Countess d'Armaillé, Boutaric, Honoré Bonhomme, Campardon, Capefigue, Le Roi, Barthélemy; — collections by M. Feuillet de Conches and M. d'Arneth; — the secret correspondence of Louis XV. with his secret diplomatic corps, that of Count Mercy-Argenteau with the Empress Maria Theresa, new editions of ancient books, autographs, recent publications — one is embarrassed by such a mass of riches. Not days, but months and years, are needed to become well acquainted with all these treasures.

But life is so short and so preoccupied with affairs that the public, with few exceptions, has neither time nor inclination to study so many volumes. Is it not a critic's business to spare his readers minute researches, to guide them through the labyrinth, to condense long works, to bring out saliently the most characteristic passages; in a word, to facilitate study and popularize history while scrupulously respecting truth? This is what we shall try to do for Louis XV. and the women of his court.

This much-decried monarch is one of those wavering, inconsequent, bizarre types of whom so many are found in our world of contradictions and miseries. Alas! who has not something of Louis XV. in his own soul? To see the good and do the evil; to believe and not to practise; to vainly seek a remedy for ennui in sensual pleasure; to act against conscience and know self-condemnation, but not amendment; to be dissatisfied with one's actions and lack strength for true repentance, — is not this the common lot? How many honest citizens are mere repetitions of Louis XV., lacking his crown! They show respect for their wives and affection for their children. They blame free thinkers severely. They speak respectfully of religion. And at the same time they do not observe the maxims of morality which they preach; they keep mistresses, they are guilty of shameful debaucheries. Their life is a series of incongruities; they know neither what they are nor what they desire. Such was Louis XV. His religion

was not hypocrisy. His attempts at conversion came to nothing, but they issued from the depths of his troubled conscience. He remained in the mire, but he dreamed of the light. Let us not be pitiless then. Is it graceful in demagogues to display such severity toward kings? Is there more morality under the red liberty caps than above the red-heeled slippers? Louis XV. was not a faithful husband, but he had a great veneration for his wife and a profound affection for his children. In spite of unpardonable scandals he was not so odious a character as he has been painted. Weakness is the word that best characterizes him, not malignity.

Take his favorites from the sovereign, and he might be not simply a worthy man, but a great king. He is intelligent and kindly. His people adore him. Fortune has crowned him. Voltaire goes into ecstasies over the glories of this reign, which the advocate Barbier declares to be the finest epoch in the entire history of France. What compromises, what ruins all this? The great enemy, voluptuousness.

Oh! how swift, how slippery, is the descent into vice! How one fault entails another! During several years (1725–1733) Louis XV. is a model husband. Then he mysteriously commits a first infidelity; afterwards he stops at nothing. He is timid at first; he hides himself, but by degrees he becomes bolder. He declares himself at first with the Countess de Mailly; afterwards with her sister, the Countess de Vintimille; however, he still main-

tains some restraint. Louis XV. is stingy with the State funds; his old preceptor, Cardinal Fleury, retains some influence over him. But Fleury dies (1743); the King has a mentor no longer; he emancipates himself; the scandal gains strength and is triumphant in the person of a third sister, the Duchess of Châteauroux. Heaven, nevertheless, sends the monarch some severe lessons; Madame de Vintimille had died in childbirth (1741); the King himself came near dying at Metz; the Duchess of Châteauroux dies of chagrin and other emotions at the close of 1744. People think Louis XV. is about to change his ways. 'Tis an error: here comes the minister in petticoats, the Marquise de Pompadour, a queen of the left hand. She, to use Voltaire's expression, is a sort of grisette made for the opera or the seraglio, who tries to amuse this bored monarch by diversions still more preposterous than his dulness. She dies at the task, and Louis XV. has not even a tear for her. As Rochefoucauld has said: "If a man thinks he loves his mistress for love of her, he is much mistaken." Louis XV. is growing old. The Queen dies in 1768. He regrets her, and people fancy that at last he is going to follow the wise advice of his surgeon, and not merely rein his horses up, but take them out of the traces. They are reckoning without the woman who is about to bring the slang of Billingsgate to Versailles. After great ladies the great citizeness; after her the woman of the people; the De Nesle sisters are followed by

Madame de Pompadour; Madame de Pompadour by Dubarry; Dubarry, the "portiere of the Revolution."

One thing strikes me in this series of royal mistresses; I see debauchery everywhere, but nowhere love. Love with its refinements, its disinterestedness, its spirit of sacrifice, its mysticism, its poetry — where is it? I perceive not even the least shadow of it. Ah! how right was Rochefoucauld in saying: "It is the same thing with true love as with the apparition of ghosts; everybody talks about, but very few have seen it." Voluptuousness, on the other hand, is shameless in its cynicism, and when I contemplate this wretched King whom it degrades and corrupts and weakens, who is wearied and complains and is sad unto death, I recall a page from one of the most eloquent of men: "The intoxication once past, there remains in the soul a doleful astonishment, a bitterly experienced void. It may be filled by new agitations; but it is reproduced again vaster than before, and this painful alternation between extreme joys and profound depression, between flashes of happiness and the impossibility of being happy, begets at last a state of continual sadness. . . . Say no longer to the man attacked by it: See what a fine day! Say no more: Listen to this sweet music! Do not even say: I love you! Light, harmony, love, all that is good and charming can do no more than irritate his secret wound. He is doomed to the *Manes*, and everything appears to him as if he were in a sepulchre, stifling for want of air and

crushed by the weight of marble. . . . There comes a moment when all the man's satiated powers give him an invincible certainty of the nothingness of the universe. Once a fleeting smile was all the despairing man needed to open limitless perspectives before him; now the adoration of the world would not affect him. He estimates it at its true value: nothing."[1]

Is not the profound sadness of Louis XV. a moral lesson as striking as any instruction from the preachers? Here is a sovereign privileged by destiny, handsome, powerful, victorious, surrounded by general admiration, possessor of the first throne of the universe, loved almost to idolatry by his people, having a tender and devoted wife, good and respectful children, soldiers who long to die bravely in his service to the cry of, "Long live the King!" He dwells in splendid palaces; when he pleases, he shakes off the yoke of etiquette and lives like a private gentleman in little residences which are masterpieces of grace and good taste; every one seeks to divine his wishes, his caprices; all the arts are pressed into the service of making life agreeable to him; all pleasures, all elegancies, conspire to charm and entertain him. His health is robust; boon-companion, bold horseman, indefatigable huntsman and lover, he enjoys every pleasure at his will. Well, he is plunged into the depths of ill-humor, the most dismal melancholy, and the senti-

[1] Lacordaire, 2d Toulouse Conference.

ment he inspires in those who observe him closely — as every memoir of the time attests — is not envy, but pity.

What conclusion can one draw from this except that neither the dazzle of riches, the prestige of pride, the fumes of incense, the caresses of flattery, the false joys of sensual pleasure, nor the intoxications of power can make man happy! He thirsts in the middle of the fountain; he finds thorns in the crown of roses that encircles his forehead, and a gnawing worm creeps, like Cleopatra's asp, into the odorous flowers whose perfume he inhales. The lamps of the festival grow dim, the boudoirs look like tombs, and suddenly the *Manes, Tekel, Phares*, appears in flaming letters on the portals of gold and marble. O King, expect neither truce to thy woes nor distraction from thine ennui, that implacable companion of thy grandeur! Thou art thine own enemy, and all will betray thee, because thou art not reconciled with thyself. Most Christian King, son of Saint Louis, thou dost suffer, and oughtest to suffer, for thou canst neither seat thyself tranquilly upon the throne nor kneel before the altar!

The end of this existence was dismal. Count de Ségur relates that as Louis XV. was going to the chase he met a funeral and approached the coffin. As he liked to ask questions, he inquired who was to be buried. They told him it was a young girl who had died of small-pox. Seized with sudden terror, he returned to his palace of Versailles and was

almost instantly attacked by the cruel malady whose very name had turned him pale. Gangrene invaded the body of the voluptuous monarch. People fled from him with terror as if he were plague-stricken. His daughters alone, his daughters, models of courage and devotion, braved the contagion and would not leave his death-bed.

Study history seriously. You fancy you will encounter scandal, but you will find edification. Corrupt epochs are perhaps more fruitful in great lessons than austere ones. It is not virtue, but vice, which cries to us: Vanity, all is vanity. It is the guilty women, the royal mistresses, who issue from their tombs and, striking their breasts, accuse themselves in presence of posterity. These beauties who appear for an instant on the scene and then vanish like shadows, these unhappy favorites who wither in a day like the grass of the field, these wretched victims of caprice and voluptuousness, all speak to us like the sinful woman of the Gospel, and history is thus morality in action.

FIRST PART

[1715–1744]

I

THE INFANTA MARIE ANNE VICTOIRE, BETROTHED OF LOUIS XV.

WHEN Louis XIV. gave up the ghost, Versailles also seemed to die. No one ventured to dwell in the palace of the Sun King. During seven years it was abandoned. September 9, 1715, at the very moment when Louis XV., then five and a half years old, was returning to Vincennes, the body of him who had been Louis XIV. was carried to its last abode, at Saint-Denis. The people danced, sang, drank, and gave themselves up to a scandalous joy. The following epigram got into circulation: —

> "Non, Louis n'était pas si dur qu'il le parut,
> Et son trépas le justifie,
> Puisque, aussi bien que le Messie,
> Il est mort pour notre salut." [1]

Such is the gratitude of peoples! This is what remains of so many flatteries, so much incense! *Sic transit gloria mundi.*

---

[1] No, Louis was less harsh than he appeared;
His death has justified him,
Since he, as well as the Messiah,
Has died for our salvation.

France, which insulted the memory of the heroic old man, was on its knees before a child. September 12, an enormous crowd was surging around the palace of the Parliament in Paris. Little Louis XV. alighted from his carriage amidst acclamations, and formally entered the palace. He took off his hat, and then, replacing it on his head, said graciously: "Gentlemen, I have come here to assure you of my affection. Monsieur the Chancellor will acquaint you with my will." And the first president responded: "We are all eager to contemplate you upon your bed of justice like the image of God on earth."

"Princes are badly brought up," says the Marquis d'Argenson. "Nothing flatters and nothing corrects them." Ought not one to be indulgent toward a prince to whom his governor, Marshal Villeray, kept repeating on the balcony of the Tuileries: "Look, master, look at these people; well! they are all yours, they all belong to you." The regent said to the little monarch: "I am here only to render you my accounts, to offer matters for your consideration, to receive and execute your orders." The child thought himself a man already.

In 1721 they affianced him to the Infanta Marie Anne Victoire, daughter of Philip V., King of Spain. Louis XV. was not yet eleven years old; the Infanta was only three. They had all the difficulty in the world to induce the monarch to say the necessary yes. His little betrothed arrived in Paris the following year

(March 22, 1722). Louis XV. went to meet her at Montrouge. All along the route the houses were decked with hangings and adorned with flowers and foliage. The next day the gazettes informed the public that the Queen — so they called the Infanta — had received from the King a doll worth twenty thousand livres. Three months later (June, 1722), Louis XV. and his betrothed established themselves at Versailles, which again became the political capital of France. The King took possession of the bedchamber of Louis XIV.,[1] which he used until 1738. The Infanta was lodged in the apartment of the Queen, and slept in the chamber[2] that had been occupied by Marie Thérèse, the Bavarian dauphiness, and the Duchess of Burgundy. She made the two youngest daughters of the regent her inseparable companions, treating them as if they were younger than herself, although they were twice her age. She kept them in leading-strings under pretext of preventing them from falling, and as she embraced them on their departure, she would say: "Little princesses, go home now and come to see me every day."

Louis XV. was crowned at Rheims, October 25, 1722. "People remember," says the Marquis d'Argenson, "how much he resembled Love that morning, with his long coat and silver cap, in the costume of a neophyte or candidate for kingship. I have

[1] Room No. 124 of the *Notice du Musée de Versailles*, by M. Eudore Soulié.

[2] Room No. 115 of the *Notice du Musée de Versailles.*

never seen anything so affecting as his figure at that time. All eyes grew moist with tenderness for this poor little prince, sole scion of a numerous family, all other members of which had perished, not without a suspicion of having been poisoned." France idolized this little King whose beauty, of a supreme distinction, had somewhat ideal in it; the Emperor of Germany said he was the child of Europe. Having completed his thirteenth year, he was, as usual, proclaimed of age (February, 1723), and that same year, the Duke of Orleans, who had most loyally fulfilled his duties toward his pupil, assumed the functions of prime minister on the death of Cardinal Dubois. He showed profound deference toward the young sovereign, and carried his portfolio to him at five o'clock every afternoon. The King enjoyed this occupation, and always looked forward impatiently to the hour.

When the Duke of Orleans died suddenly at Versailles (December 2, 1723), Louis XV. regretted him sincerely. It was a woman who reigned under cover of the new prime minister, the Duke of Bourbon. She was one of those ambitious creatures to whom the moral sense is lacking, but who possess wit, grace, and charm; one of those enchantresses who, by dint of intrigues, end by falling into their own snares and cruelly expiate their short-lived triumphs. The Marquise de Prie, the all-powerful mistress of the Duke, was twenty-five years old. The daughter of the rich financier Berthelot de Pléneuf, she had married a

nobleman whom she managed to have appointed ambassador to Turin. She led a very fast life in that city, and got herself into debt. Her father being unable to maintain her any longer, she was obliged to escape from the courts of justice, and the Marquis de Prie was recalled from his embassy. The young Marquise was not the woman to be discouraged by such reverses. She had only to show herself in order to subjugate the Duke of Bourbon, and assume a princely luxury. "She had a charming face," says the Marquis d'Argenson, "a sharp and crafty wit, a touch of genius, ambition, and recklessness. . . . The Duke was madly in love with her. I knew their habits, their visits to the opera ball, their little house in the rue Sainte Apolline, their gray-looking hack, which had the appearance of a public conveyance on the outside, but was extremely magnificent within. . . . She played the queen just as I would make a valet-de-chambre of my lackey."

When they were carrying the reliquary of Sainte Geneviève in procession in 1725, because the rains had spoilt the crops, she said: "The people are crazy; don't they know that it is I who make rain and fine weather?"

Violent under an air of gentleness, insatiable for money and power beneath an exterior of careless disinterestedness, a libertine through habit rather than from passion, running after pleasure without seeking love, betraying with impunity her lover who believed what she said against the evidence of his own eyes,

Madame de Prie despotically ruled both the Duke of Bourbon and France. But one thing disquieted her: the young King's health was delicate. If he should die suddenly, the crown would revert to the Orleans branch, between which family and the Duke of Bourbon there existed a thoroughgoing enmity. In 1725 the Infanta, the betrothed of Louis XV., was only seven years old. Several years must elapse, therefore, before the marriage could be consummated. Now, there was no repose possible for the Duke and his favorite so long as the King had no direct heir. The Duke slept at Versailles in an apartment directly under that of the King. One night he thought he heard more noise and movement than usual. He rosè precipitately and went up stairs in a great fright and his dressing gown. The first surgeon, Maréchal, astonished to see him appear in this guise, asked the cause of his alarm. The Duke, beside himself, could only stammer: "I heard some noise — the King is sick — what will become of me?" Somewhat reassured by Maréchal, he consented to go down again to his apartment, but he was overheard muttering to himself: "I would never get back here again. If he recovers, we must marry him." It was resolved to send back the Infanta on account of her youth. Her father, Philip V., was indignant at such an outrage. "There is not blood enough in all Spain to avenge such an insult," said he. At Madrid the shouting populace were allowed to drag an effigy of Louis XV. through the streets,

and the shepherds of the Spanish Pyrenees came into the pasture lands of French valleys to hamstring the cattle.

Two Princesses of Orleans were then in Spain. They were both daughters of the regent, and had been sent to Madrid at the time when Marie Anne Victoire, the betrothed of Louis XV., had come to France.[1] One of them, Mademoiselle de Montpensier, born in 1709, married the Prince of the Asturias, eldest son of Philip V. The other, Mademoiselle de Beaujolais, born in 1714, was affianced to Don Carlos, brother to the Prince of the Asturias. The first was sad, cross, and whimsical; the second, on the contrary, was a delightful child, as pretty as she was intelligent. When she arrived in Spain, she was seven years old, the same age as Don Carlos, and Queen Elizabeth Farnese wrote to the Duke of Orleans: "Her little husband is in transports of joy over her, and is only too happy to have such a charming Princess."

When Philip V. abdicated in 1724, in favor of the Prince of the Asturias (Louis I.), Mademoiselle de Montpensier became Queen. But the new King died at the end of eight months. Philip V. resumed the crown, and the widow remained without any influence at court. As soon as it was known at Madrid that Louis XV. was not to marry the In-

[1] See the interesting work by M. Édouard de Barthélemy, *Les filles du Regent*, 2 vols., Firmin Didot.

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magnificence and ceremony. She left Versailles April 5, 1725, and on reaching the frontier, she was exchanged at Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port for the two Princesses of Orleans (the widow of King Louis and Mademoiselle de Beaujolais). Married in 1729 to Joseph Emanuel, then Prince, afterwards King of Portugal, "she gave that sovereign," says Voltaire, "the children she was not allowed to give to Louis XV. and was not happier on account of it." As to the two Princesses of Orleans, their destiny was unhappy: the queen dowager of Spain, who died in 1742, lived in poverty, with a barren title and the simulacrum of a court. Her two families had but one thought, — that of ridding themselves of the support of this unfortunate young woman. Spain showed excessive negligence in the payment of her pension, and after having reigned over one of the principal kingdoms of the world, she was obliged, by economical reasons, to spend three consecutive years with the Carmelites of Paris. Still living, she was treated as if already dead. Her sister, Mademoiselle de Beaujolais, so amiable, sweet, and attractive, retained a tender memory of her former betrothed, Don Carlos (the future Charles III.), who, on his side, did not forget her. Possibly a means of renewing their engagement might have been found. But the young girl died in 1734, carrying her faithful regret with her to the tomb. She was not yet twenty.

The rupture of the marriage of Louis XV. was not

a fortunate event. The Prince was only fifteen years old. He might easily have waited several years longer before marrying. His studies and his energy would both have been the gainers by it. Moreover, it was an evil thing to insult a great nation like Spain. It was not alone the Spanish people that were outraged, but the glorious memory of the Infanta's great-grandfather, the grand King who had said: "There are no more Pyrenees." A fatal lesson was given to the young sovereign when he was thus taught to violate sworn faith, and habituated from his adolescence to those culpable caprices, those egotistic desertions of which his reign was to afford more than one example.

II

THE MARRIAGE OF MARIE LECZINSKA

IN the year 1725, a poor exiled king and his family were living in a dilapidated old commandery in Wissemburg, a little town of Alsace. This king without a kingdom, this fugitive who dignified his poverty by the resignation with which he endured misfortune, was the Pole, Stanislas Leczinski, the protégé of Charles XII. of Sweden. Driven from Poland after a very short reign, Stanislas had found an asylum in France, and lived in Wissemburg in complete retirement with his mother, his wife, his daughter, and several gentlemen who had been faithful to him in misfortune. His daughter, Marie, born in Breslau, June 23, 1703, was at this time twenty-two years old. Pious, gentle, and sympathetic, she was the joy of the exiles. When they spoke to her of projected marriages, she would say to her parents: "Do not think you can make me happy by sending me away; it would be far sweeter to me to share your ill-fortune than to enjoy, at a distance, a happiness which would not be yours." Her education had been as intelligent as it was austere. She spent the

time not occupied in prayer and study in working for the poor of the city or embroidering ornaments for churches. She was a true Christian, one of those admirable young girls whose charm has in it something evangelic, and who make virtue lovable.

One day Stanislas, much moved, entered the room where his wife and daughter were. "Let us kneel down," he exclaimed, "and return thanks to God!" — "Father," said Marie, "have you been called back to the throne of Poland?" — "Ah! daughter," he replied, "Heaven is far more favorable to us than that. You are Queen of France." It was not a dream. The exile's daughter, the poor and obscure Princess, living on alms from the French court, who, but the day before, would have been happy to marry one of those who were now to be her principal officials, ascended as if by miracle the greatest throne in the world. How had she happened to be preferred to the ninety-nine marriageable princesses, a list of whom had been drawn up at Versailles? There was but this simple remark below her name in the list: "Nothing disadvantageous is known concerning this family." Louis XV. who had sent back the daughter of a King of Spain could choose among the wealthiest and most highly placed princesses in Europe. How did they contrive to make him marry this poor Polish girl who brought him no dot and who was seven years his senior (in an inverse sense, the same difference of age that existed between him and the Infanta, his first betrothed)? It is true that a former

secretary of embassy, Lozillières, whom the Duke of Bourbon had sent to make inquiries about twenty-seven princesses, had thus drawn the portrait of Marie Leczinska: "This Princess, as simple as the daughter of Alcinoüs, who knows no cosmetics but water and snow, and, seated between her mother and her grandmother, embroiders altar-cloths, recalls to us, in the commandery of Wissemburg, the artlessness of heroic times." Was it this mythological style which affected sceptical and depraved souls like those of the Duke of Bourbon and his mistress, Madame de Prie?

It was not this, at all events, which chiefly preoccupied them. If they selected Marie Leczinska, it was because they fancied that, owing her elevation solely to their caprice, she would esteem herself in their debt and be their tool. What pleased them in her was that she had no resources; that a price had been set upon her father's head; that the exile, dispossessed of his throne for thirteen years, had wandered from asylum to asylum, in Turkey, in Sweden, in the principality of Deux-Ponts, and in Alsace; that the young girl was merely agreeable without being beautiful; that she was seven years older than Louis XV.; and that in calling her to the throne in the most unforeseen and inconceivable manner, the Duke and Madame de Prie would create for themselves exceptional claims upon her gratitude.

Louis XV. was at this time the most beautiful youth in the kingdom. An ideal lustre illuminated his charming visage, and when they were praising the

graces of her young betrothed to Marie Leczinska: "Alas!" said she, "you redouble my alarms."

One should read in the sympathetic work of the Countess d'Armaillé,[1] the story of the beginnings of this union which was at first to be so happy. Louis XV. made his official request for the hand of Marie Leczinska through Cardinal de Rohan, Bishop of Strasburg. She contented herself with responding: "I am penetrated with gratitude, Monsieur the Cardinal, for the honor done me by the King of France. My will belongs to my parents, and their consent will be mine." The marriage by proxy took place at Strasburg, August 14, 1725. The King was represented by the Duke of Orleans. After having received her parents' blessing, and distributed souvenirs to the faithful companions of her exile, Marie went to join Louis XV. She was greeted everywhere she went with extravagant laudations. "There is nothing which the good French people do not do to divert me," she wrote at the time to Stanislas Leczinski. "They say the finest things in the world to me, but nobody says that you may be near me. Perhaps they will say so presently, for I am journeying in fairyland, and am veritably under their magical dominion. At every instant I undergo transformations, of which one is more brilliant than the other. Sometimes I am fairer than the Graces;

[1] *La Reine Leczinska*, by Madame the Countess d'Armaillé, born De Ségur, 1 vol., Dentu.

again, I belong to the family of the Nine Sisters; here, I have the virtues of an angel; there, the sight of me makes people happy. Yesterday I was the wonder of the world; to-day I am the lucky star. Every one does his best to deify me, and doubtless I shall be placed among the immortals to-morrow. To dispel the illusion, I lay my hand on my head, and instantly find again her whom you love, and who loves you very tenderly." The new Queen of France signed this letter with the Polish diminutive of her name: Maruchna.

At Sézanne, September 3, a page, the Prince of Conti, brought her a bouquet from Louis XV. Near Moret, the next day, she saw her husband for the first time. As soon as he appeared she threw herself on her knees on a cushion; the King raised her at once and embraced her affectionately. The royal pair made their entry at Fontainebleau September 5, and were crowned the following day. "The Queen," wrote Voltaire, "makes a very good appearance, although her face is not at all pretty. Everybody is enchanted with her virtue and her politeness. The first thing she did was to distribute among the princesses and ladies of the palace all the magnificent trinkets composing what is called her *corbeille*, which consisted of jewels of every sort except diamonds. When she saw the casket in which they had been placed: 'This is the first time in my life,' said she, 'that I have been able to make presents.' She wore a little rouge on her wedding day, just enough to

prevent her from looking pale. She fainted for an instant in the chapel, but only for form's sake. There was a comedy performed the same day. I had prepared a little entertainment which M. de Mortemart would not execute. In place of it they gave *Amphion* and *Le Médecin malgre lui*, which did not seem very appropriate. After supper there were fireworks with many rockets and very little invention and variety. . . . For the rest, there is a frightful noise, racket, crowd, and tumult here."

The Queen pleased everybody by her extreme affability. What they admired was neither the magnificence of her costume, the Sancy that sparkled on her corsage, nor the Regent that glittered on her chaste forehead, but her modesty, her benevolence, her gentleness, the grace which is still more beautiful than beauty. Voltaire was in the front rank of the courtiers of this new star which shed so soft a lustre. But he did not find his rôle as flatterer rewarded by sufficient gratuities. Hence he wrote from Fontainebleau: "I have been very well received by the Queen. She wept over *Marianne*, she laughed over *L'Indiscret;* she oftens talks to me, she calls me her poor Voltaire. A blockhead would be satisfied with all this; but, unfortunately, I think soundly enough to feel that praise does not amount to much, and that the rôle of a poet at court always entails upon him something slightly ridiculous. You would not believe, my dear Thiriot, how tired I am of my life as a courtier. *Henri IV.* is very stupidly sacri-

ficed at the court of Louis XV. I bewail the moments I rob him of. The poor child ought to have appeared already in quarto, with fine paper, fine margins, and fine type. That will surely come this winter, whatever may happen. I think you will find this work somewhat more finished than *Marianne*. The epic is my *forte*, or I am very much mistaken. . . . The Queen is constantly assassinated with Pindaric odes, sonnets, epistles, and epithalamiums. I fancy she takes the poets for court-fools; and in this case she is quite right, for it is great folly for a man of letters to be here. They give no pleasure and receive none."[1]

By dint of compliments in prose and verse, Voltaire obtained a pension of 1500 livres, which made him write to *la présidente* de Bernières, November 13, 1725: "I count on the friendliness of Madame de Prie. I no longer complain of court life, I begin to have reasonable expectations."

Some days afterwards (December 1, 1725), Marie Leczinska left Fontainebleau and went to Versailles. She installed herself in what were called the Queen's apartments, and slept in the chamber which had been successively occupied by Marie Thérèse, the Bavarian Dauphiness, the Duchess of Burgundy, and the Infanta Marie Anne Victoire. There she brought her ten children into the world, and it was there she was to die.

[1] Letter to M. Thiriot, October 17, 1725.

The early days of the marriage were very happy; at that time Louis XV. was a model youth. The counsels of his former preceptor, the Bishop of Fréjus; the sense of duty; religious beliefs; the timidity inseparable from adolescence, — all these contributed to keep in the paths of wisdom the young monarch who dreamed of being a good husband and father, a good king, and working out his own salvation along with the welfare of his subjects. Naturally inclined to the pleasures of the senses, he attached himself to Marie Leczinska with the ardor of an innocent young man who loves for the first time. Notwithstanding the shamelessness of many of them, the court beauties did not yet venture to raise their eyes toward this royal adolescent, who made even the most audacious respectful, by his gentleness and his reserve. Nothing, at this time, announced the disorders to which the young monarch was one day to yield himself. The *roués* of the Regency could not console themselves for having so calm and virtuous a master; they awaited with impatience the moment when they could thrust him over the declivity of scandal, and, like real demons, they lay in wait for their prey.

III

THE DISGRACE OF THE MARQUISE DE PRIE

THE Marquise de Prie congratulated herself upon having brought Marie Leczinska to the throne. It was, in fact, as D'Argenson has remarked, an excellent choice, according to the views of the Marquise: "Fecundity, piety, sweetness, humanity, and, above all, a great incapacity for affairs. This court policy required, moreover, a woman without attractions and without coquetry, who could only retain her husband through the sense of duty and the necessity of giving heirs to the crown." The Duke and his favorite had found in the Queen all the gratitude and complaisance they had counted on. As to the King, amused by the chase, festivities, journeys to Marly, Chantilly, and Rambouillet, he occupied himself with politics very little. The prime minister could flatter himself on being a real mayor of the palace. But he had reckoned without a prelate of seventy-four years, to whom ambition had come with age, and who was about to cast down with a breath all this scaffolding of intrigues and calculations.

Fleury, Bishop of Fréjus, the preceptor of Louis XV., was of humble origin, having been the son of a tithe-collector[1] in the diocese of Fréjus. Appointed chaplain to Queen Marie Thérèse in 1680, "he was," says Saint-Simon, "received at the ministers' houses where, in fact, he was of as little importance as he was elsewhere, and often supplied the place of a bell before such things had been invented." He was selected as preceptor for the little Prince, who was to be styled Louis XV., and gained his pupil's good-will by his easy, gentle, and insinuating character, his perfect calmness, and his mingled veneration and tenderness for a child who, thinking himself always menaced, felt that this assiduous and obsequious devotion protected him. The secret of his affection for Fleury was that Fleury never opposed him. He affected, moreover, an absolute disinterestedness, and seemed to be making a sacrifice to the King by remaining at court instead of taking refuge in a convent. The Bishop was always one of the party when the young King was working, or pretending to work, with his Ministers. In appearance he guarded the most humble, most insignificant attitude; but, in reality, he exerted an influence which exasperated the Duke, and still more Madame de Prie. The Queen herself was jealous of the confidence enjoyed by this silent old man who

[1] *Receveur des décimes* — the tithe formerly paid by the clergy to the kings of France.

followed the King like his shadow, and who seemed likely to monopolize everything in spite of his modest airs. The Marquise, who had constant access to the Queen in her capacity as lady of the palace, contrived a real plot with her. It was a question of getting rid of this troublesome third person who was always putting himself between the King and the Prime Minister. "In order to deliver herself from the old Bishop, Madame de Prie devised a scheme by which she might take his place, and enter almost openly into the council of State. She persuaded her lover to induce the King to work in the apartments of the Queen whom he loved, at least with that love which every young man feels for the first woman he possesses. The preceptor, having no lessons to give there, would not follow his pupil, so that, without being pushed too rudely he would slip out of his place, and, naturally, find himself on the ground. Then the Marquise, relying on the good-nature of the Queen, would introduce herself as a fourth, and from that time on would govern the State. Although the plan seemed to her an admirable one, yet its success was not equally so."[1]

The little conspiracy, however, had been conducted with great vigor. One evening, the Queen, who happened to be with the Duke of Bourbon, sent the King a request to come to her. Louis XV. complied, and the Prime Minister handed him a letter

[1] Memoirs of Duclos.

from Cardinal de Polignac containing violent accusations against the Bishop of Fréjus. This was the first time that Fleury had not been present when the King and the Duke were together. Convinced that his exclusion was henceforth determined, he went at once to his own apartment, and after writing a very mournful but tender and respectful letter in which he took leave of his young master, he departed at once for the Sulpician convent at Issy. The Duke and Madame de Prie thought themselves sure of victory, but they were in too great haste to triumph. On reading the letter of his former preceptor the King began to weep. He dared not avow the cause of his chagrin, however, and being always timid and irresolute, he kept silence. His first gentleman, the Duke de Mortemart, at last emboldened him. "What! Sire, are you not the master?" said he. "Have the Duke told to send a messenger at once for Monseigneur de Fréjus, and you will see him again." This was no sooner said than done. The Bishop returned, and hid his success at first under the appearance of modesty. He pretended to desire nothing for himself, and showed profound deference toward the Duke, but the Prime Minister and his favorite were doomed.

The little King, with his seventeen years, was about to show that he was master. With that dissimulation which from infancy he had been accustomed to consider a quality indispensable to princes, he silently prepared the Duke's downfall. As he

was getting into his carriage to go to Rambouillet, June 11, 1727, he said to his Prime Minister with the most gracious air in the world: "I expect you to supper this evening." The Duke re-entered the château in perfect confidence. But what was his surprise when, three hours later, he received a royal letter in these terms: —

"I order you, under pain of disobedience, to repair to Chantilly, and to remain there until further orders." This was a veritable exile. The Duke submitted without a murmur. At the same time, the Queen received this laconic billet from Louis XV.: "I beg you, Madame, and if necessary, I order you, to do all that the Bishop of Fréjus shall tell you from me as if he were myself." The poor Queen wept and resigned herself. As to Madame de Prie, she was struck at the same time as her lover, and relegated to her estate of Courbépine in Normandy. M. de Prie was startled at this disgrace. He went about asking people with an affectation which made everybody smile: "But what is there in common between the Duke and my wife?" Those who but yesterday were at the feet of the Duke and his favorite now overwhelmed them with gibes and sarcasms. The people lighted bonfires, and the walls were covered with posters whereon might be read: "A hundred pistoles' reward for whoever finds a valuable mare accustomed to follow a one-eyed horse." [1]

[1] The Duke was blind in one eye.

M. Michelet, usually so severe and merciless toward the court of Louis XV., speaks with a certain complacency of the Marquise de Prie. "Though history ought to be severe toward this female tyrant," says he, "it is, nevertheless, a duty to own the vigor with which she supported the bold attempts of Duverney. This rude government, thoroughly violent and shameless as it was, had, nevertheless, instincts of life which one may regret in the mortal torpor of the asphyxia which followed it." One hardly comprehends this indulgence, for there was nothing moral, nothing great in the ephemeral reign of the Duke and his mistress.

It is not an easy thing for a coquettish, ambitious woman, accustomed to have her caprices accepted as laws, to endure disgrace, humiliation, and retirement. Madame de Prie was at first under an illusion. She thought she would be speedily recalled to Versailles, but when she saw she was mistaken, and that her place as lady of the palace had been given to the Marquise d'Arlincourt, her disappointment was cruel. According to M. Michelet: "She devoured her own heart, and could not conceal it. No caged lion or tiger ever was so restless. She was furious, and talked nonsense. She hoped to die, and later on she tried to kill herself by furious excesses; but in vain. She lost nothing by it but her health, her freshness, and her beauty. *In extremis* she still retained a lover and a friend in her desert. The latter, very malicious, very corrupt, a real cat, was Madame du

Deffand, and the two friends scratched each other every day between their caresses. The lover, a young man of merit, persisted in loving her, bad as she was. She was hopelessly dried up, and her last punishment was that she could not resume life through love. She was devoured by pride. She no longer desired anything but to die like a Roman woman, like Petronia."

All this seems to us exaggerated. We believe Madame de Prie was too frivolous to experience such despair. She had not waited for her exile in order to know those alternations of sadness and folly which accompany vice even when it has the air of being happy. For some time, already, the taste for intrigue, the thirst for pleasure, the ardor of ambition, had kindled in her veins a fever which undermined her strength. Her plumpness had been succeeded by an excessive lankness. Struggling against ill-health with extreme energy, she tried to build herself up, to put a good face on everything, to shake off trouble, and find amusement. Though her body was so much weakened, says the Marquis d'Argenson, her mind and temper were still as gay, shrewd, merry, and frivolous as in the times of her greatest prosperity. Even in her misfortune she had courtiers who deceived her. She had become ugly, and her flatterers continued to tell her she was adorable. She was hopelessly ill, and her physicians told her she was doing very well. Two days before her death she played in a comedy, and recited three hundred

lines with as much sentiment as memory. Nevertheless, she had predicted her approaching death. People thought, however, that this was but a jest, a pleasantry. Hence, when she breathed her last, October 6, 1728, after such convulsions that her toes were turned towards her heels, a rumor that she had poisoned herself got abroad. Such a suicide is improbable, and not easily reconcilable with the superficial character of Madame de Prie. M. Michelet adds that she made a farcical confession (*bouffonna une confession*) — these are the expressions employed by an historian who is often too fanciful. What can M. Michelet know about it? Why does he affirm that she did not repent of her faults and errors? Greater sinners than she have been illuminated at the last moment by a ray of light. It is certain, at all events, that the sudden and terrible death of this young woman of only twenty-nine years, who expiated so cruelly her shameful successes, was a striking lesson for her contemporaries. Was Madame de Prie's deathbed conversion sincere? God only knows.

IV

THE KING FAITHFUL TO THE QUEEN

FOR several years Louis XV. gave no scandal. Faithful to his religious duties, he lived like a good Christian and good husband. The courtiers, habituated to the manners of the Regency, did not conceal their surprise and annoyance. One day, in January, 1729, when there had been several sleighing excursions, old Marshal de Villars wrote: "These sleighing parties give the ladies some hopes that things are going to be rather livelier. There was dancing after supper, and if that happens often, it is not impossible that some courageous beauty may lay hold of the King." But this daring beauty was not to be found. The intimidating politeness and freezing glance of the young sovereign kept all women at a distance. Louis XV. did not yield. People wondered whether pride or timidity, goodness or egotism, wisdom or ennui, was what gave its predominating character to his attitude of taciturnity and extreme reserve.

The character of the King, who as yet did not know himself, was an enigma to the court. Ver-

sailles, under the direction of an aged priest, resembled an Escurial, and the small apartments destined to so scandalous a future had at this time the tranquillity of a convent or a sanctuary. If any one mentioned a woman famous for her beauty to the monarch, he would merely say: "She is not more beautiful than the Queen." Marie Leczinska kept her spouse within the bounds of duty by her exquisite goodness, her remoteness from all intrigue, her submissive and gentle spirit. Loving neither luxury nor racket, she lived like a worthy citizeness, charitable, modest, and entirely occupied with her salvation. She arrived in France in September, 1725, and for three years she did not see Paris. A sort of votive pilgrimage took her there for the first time on October 4, 1728. She had brought twin daughters into the world the previous year, Louise Elizabeth and Henriette of France; this time she desired a son, and to obtain one from Heaven she came to invoke the intercession of the Blessed Virgin in the Parisian churches. Barbier, the advocate, thus describes in his *Journal* Marie Leczinska's pious excursion: —

"October. — Monday, 4, our good Queen has seen Paris. She came to Notre Dame to ask a dauphin from the Virgin, and from there she went to Saint-Geneviève with the same end in view. She made this journey *incognita* after a fashion; that is to say, it was not a formal entry. She had only her usual suite, which consists of four carriages with eight

horses apiece. . . . As to the person of the Queen, she is little, rather slender than stout, not pretty without being disagreeable, and looks good-natured and gentle, which does not impart the majesty needful in a queen. She went about a good deal in Paris and saw astonishing crowds of people. They say that money to the extent of twelve thousand livres was scattered from the door of her carriage."

Marie Leczinska's prayer was heard. The next year she had a son (September 4, 1729). She gave the King ten children in ten years (1727–1737). And yet there was no real intimacy between the married pair. During the daytime they scarcely addressed a word to each other. One might have said they never came together but from a sense of duty, for the welfare of the State. Cold, polite, reserved, they mutually intimidated each other.

Was the Queen as clever as she ought to have been in order to keep Louis XV. in the straight path? One may be permitted to doubt it. Her frank and simple nature knew neither astuteness nor diplomacy. The secrets of feminine coquetry were completely foreign to her. If D'Argenson is to be believed, she was not adroit. He says she was too prudish with her husband, thinking she had noticed that in France it was considered in good taste to be so. He accuses her of overdoing the matter, and then lamenting her mistake with bitter tears when it was past all remedy. He says, too, that she did not do all that was in her power to make her society

agreeable to her husband. "At the beginning of his marriage," he writes, "the King wanted to spend his evenings in the Queen's apartments, playing cards and chatting. The Queen, instead of attracting him thither, putting him at his ease, and amusing him, played the disdainful. Hence the King grew disgusted, accustomed himself to pass the evenings in his own apartments, at first with men and afterwards with women, his cousin Charolais, the Countess of Toulouse. The King is naturally very timid and seeks for those with whom he can be at his ease. When he once meets them, it is plain to what degree he is a man of habitudes."

The Queen would have tried in vain to use the language of passion to her husband or treat him to jealous scenes. Louis XV. had a horror of everything that seemed to him exaggerated. In his wife's chagrin he would have seen a freak, a forgetfulness of etiquette, a want of deference. Already, in 1726, Marshal de Villars had recommended calmness and resignation to Marie Leczinska. He says in his Memoirs: "The Queen led me into her cabinet, and spoke to me with keen sorrow of the changes she observed in the King's affection. Her tears flowed abundantly. I replied: 'I think, Madame, that the King's heart is far removed from what is called love; you are not the same with regard to him; but, believe me, it is best not to display your passion too much; don't let any one see that you fear a diminution in his sentiments, lest the many fine eyes that are ogling

him continually should risk everything in order to profit by this change. For the rest, it is all the better for you that the King's heart is not much inclined to tenderness, because where passion is concerned, natural coldness is less cruel than abandonment.' "

What is to become of this undecided, timid, vacillating king? In which direction will this young man go, who, like Hercules in the fable, is hesitating between Virtue and Pleasure? Will he be a saint or a debauchee? He wants to do what is right, but will he have the courage? Everything conspires to thrust him into the evil way. His morality is begrudged him. The air he breathes is poisonous. The women, who incessantly provoke him, rival each other in glances and coquetries. His former preceptor, now become directing minister, dares not venture a counsel. His first *valet de chambre*, Bachelier, already dreams of playing the pander, and great lords, with the Duke de Richelieu at their head, likewise aspire to those sorry but lucrative functions. Who would dare to reprimand the monarch if he gave a scandalous example? The clergy hold their peace. The nobles demand but one thing from the King: to choose his mistress among women of quality. Shame needs a blazon. The *bourgeoisie* will be too prudent to meddle with the secrets of the gods. D'Argenson and Barbier, the nobleman and the advocate, will rival each other in indulgent judgments on adultery.

In D'Argenson's eyes the sole fault of favorites is

their propensity to meddle with State affairs. He adds: "I approve of private persons confiding in a mistress in whose affection they believe; it makes little scandal, and is even edification and honesty, according to the present relaxation of manners, which are coming closer and closer to nature." Barbier, the lawyer, goes farther still. He says in his *Journal*, with an astonishing mixture of cynicism and naïveté: "Fifteen out of twenty nobles of the court do not live with their wives, and do have mistresses; nothing is so common even among private persons. It is ridiculous, then, that the King, who is certainly the master, should be in worse condition than his predecessors."

The courtiers could not accustom themselves to the absence of a royal mistress. It seemed to them as if there was a place vacant, a post to which some one ought to be appointed. How could any one fancy Henri IV. without *la belle Gabrielle*, Louis XIV. without La Vallière and Montespan? And what! said they with indignation, shall Louis XV. confine himself to his wife, that Polish woman without beauty, and seven years older than himself? In their eyes this would be to derogate from all the traditions of French gallantry. The military men, impatient of peace, fancied that a favorite might be an Agnes Sorel, who would rouse this new Charles VIII. from his torpor, and lead him to victory. Fashionable young people were persuaded that Versailles would become animated, that there would be feasts, *suppers*, diversions, pleasures of every kind.

The enemies of Cardinal Fleury, all those in search of places, money, or credit, thought that a mistress would bring about the downfall of the old minister, so careful of the State funds. Ah! if the monarch yields, if he succumbs to temptation, the guilty ones will be the counsellors, the cynical, corrupt egotists, who persuade him to evil, who deify his caprices, who exalt his adulteries; they will be Richelieu, the official go-between; Voltaire, the laureate in prose and verse of the reign of the favorites; the women who entreat the Christian Sultan to throw them the handkerchief; the entire century, still more responsible and blameworthy than the King.

V

THE FAVOR OF THE COUNTESS DE MAILLY

THERE are two kinds of royal favorites: the proud and the humble; those who make a boast of scandal and those who blush at it. The proud brag of their shame as if it were a victory; insatiable for money, credit, pleasures, they are intoxicated with the incense burned at their feet, and haughtily wave the sceptre of left-handed queens. The humble are less unreasonable; they voluntarily abase themselves; they try to gain pardon for a situation whose ignominy they comprehend, and though they have not sufficient moral sense to be willing to renounce the profits of their rôle, neither have they the impudence to make an imperious demand of homage and adulation. At the court of Louis XIV. Madame de Montespan was the type of the haughty mistress. The first mistress of Louis XV., the Countess de Mailly, must be classed among the humble ones.

Louise Julie de Mailly-Nesle, the eldest of five sisters who all played a part at court, was of the same age as the King: like him she was born in

1710. Married in 1726 to Count Louis Alexandre de Mailly, her cousin-german, her fortune was small, and the need of money was said to be one occasion of her faults. The huntsman Le Roy, that master of the hunt who was so sagacious an observer, and whom Sainte-Beuve has qualified as La Bruyère on horseback, thus delineates the portrait of the countess: "This lady was very far from being pretty; but her figure and her manners were very graceful, her sensibility was already recognized, and she had a complaisant character adapted to the abridgment of formalities. This was essential to vanquish the timidity of a prince who was still a novice, whom the least reserve would have abashed. They were sure, moreover, of the disinterestedness of her who was destined to become the favorite, and of her aversion from all ambitious schemes. Some difficulty was experienced in establishing a complete familiarity between a prince excessively timid and a woman whose birth, at least, obliged her to have some regard for appearances." Madame de Mailly was lady of the palace to the Queen. This facilitated matters. At first everything was managed with the utmost secrecy. "I have learned," says the Duke de Luynes in his Memoirs, "that the commerce of the King with Madame de Mailly commenced as early as 1733. I know this to be true beyond all doubt, and at that time no one suspected it."

The favor of the King's mistress was not known to

the public until four years later, and the advocate Barbier declared "that there was nothing to say, the name of De Nesle being one of the first in the kingdom." "The Queen," says D'Argenson, "is in a cruel situation at present, on account of Madame de Mailly, whom she is obliged to retain as lady of the palace. During this lady's weeks she is in a horrible humor, and all her domestics feel the effects of it. Certainly, to make a third after supper, between her and Madame de Mailly, is to render her a great service." The poor Queen at last resigned herself. When a woman no longer appeals to either a man's heart or his senses, what can she do? One day when Madame de Mailly asked her sovereign's permission to go to a pleasure-house where Louis XV. was, Marie Leczinska merely replied: "You are the mistress."

Cardinal Fleury did not complain, because the favorite neither meddled with affairs nor cost the King much. At this time Louis XV. was as economical as he was timid. Count de Mailly, who had set up an equipage as soon as his wife came into favor, was soon obliged to sell it again, and continued to live a needy life.

In 1738, when Madame de Mailly was openly acknowledged as mistress, Louis XV. changed his bedchamber. He left that where Louis XIV. had died, and which he had himself occupied since 1722, to install himself in the chamber contiguous to the Council hall, and which, even in the time of Louis

XIV., had been designated as the billiard room (room No. 126 of the *Notice du Musée de Versailles*, by M. Eudore Soulié).

Louis XV. found this chamber more convenient than the other, because it opened the series of small rooms called the cabinets (rooms Nos. 126 to 134 of the *Notice*[1]), where Louis XV. admitted a very small number of courtiers to his intimacy. It was there he hid himself from the vulgar crowd; there that, living more like a private person than a king, he spent his time in trifles and futilities unworthy of a sovereign. There he made tapestry like a woman, or, like a cook, prepared side-dishes with truffles. There, supping after the chase, he sought forgetfulness of his remorse in bumpers of champagne. It was there he sought a remedy for his, alas! incurable melancholy; there that he allowed himself to be vanquished by his enemy, voluptuousness.

Beneath the King's chamber lodged the Countess de Toulouse, widowed within a year of the son of Louis XIV. and Madame de Montespan. The countess occupied the apartment called the apartment of the baths, which, after having been the abode of Madame de Montespan, had been given to the sons of the celebrated favorite, first to the Duke du Maine, and afterward to the Count de Toulouse (rooms Nos.

[1] The chamber of Louis XV. and the cabinets are now used as the apartment of the President of the National Assembly.

52, 53, and 54 of the *Notice du Musée*). This apartment had one great advantage: it communicated by a private staircase with the King's study. The Count de Toulouse had the key to this precious staircase. His widow had sufficient address to induce the King to leave it with her. She was at this time a woman of about fifty, who no longer wore rouge, and often spent several hours in a confessional in the chapel, where she read by the light of a candle. In spite of her austere appearance, she was the intimate friend of the Countess de Mailly, and slanderous tongues accused her of facilitating the latter's meetings with the King.

Another woman also lived in close friendship with Louis XV. This was Mademoiselle de Charolais, who was born in 1695 and died in 1758 unmarried. A sister of the Duke of Bourbon, she had the hauteur of the Condés and the wit of the Mortemarts. She was a type of the extravagant *grande dame*, a capricious, witty woman, greedy for pleasure, frolicsome as an elf, and fearless as a page. "This princess is very accommodating to the King," says the Marquis d'Argenson; "she keeps company with Madame de Mailly, and, in the midst of her complaisance, she sometimes proposes to the King to take a prettier mistress. At other times she advises Madame de Mailly to profit by her reign, and secure all the riches and grandeur that she can. . . . Madame de Mailly is honest and well-intentioned, and confides in her. This is what sustains her, in spite of her lighthearted-

ness, her temper, and the variety of opinions which torment her. But as she is noble in the midst of her necessities, her demands are not acrimonious nor her intrigues underhanded and circuitous."

Among the influential persons surrounding the King let us not forget his first *valet de chambre*, Bachelier, the master's confidant; Bachelier with his occult power, his fifty thousand pounds of income, his charming property of La Celle, which the sovereign honors by visiting. Listen again to D'Argenson: "Le sieur Bachelier is a philosopher, well content with his fortune, which is a good one. He has an income, a country house, and a mistress. He loves his master and is loved by him; he desires the public welfare. People of this character are difficult to displace; it is this also which accounts for the force and elevation of our cardinal, and, fortunately for France, the King likes men of this sort. It is true that Bachelier is still a go-between" (D'Argenson employs a stronger word). "But his office allows this, just as that of a soldier permits him to be a slayer of men. Perhaps it is he who prescribed to the King to limit himself to a single mistress, as he has done up to the present with little Mailly; or to seldom change them, and not to be prodigal of money or power."

Nothing great could issue from such a society. This voluptuous existence, parodied without poetry or enthusiasm from the scenes of Lancret and Watteau, belittled and atrophied the moral sense of the

King. What could he learn from a futile and idle woman like Madame de Mailly, entirely devoted to trifles and her toilet? Listening from morning to night to silly and insignificant tittle-tattle, Louis XV. himself became womanish. His preoccupations were mean, his ideas narrow. He interested himself in petty gossip unworthy of a king, unworthy of a man. Madame de Mailly had neither wit enough to amuse him nor tact enough to lead him. After awhile she wearied him. He kept her near him, however, while looking about for her successor.

VI

THE COUNTESS DE VINTIMILLE

IN 1738, the Countess de Mailly had been for five years the mistress of Louis XV., or, rather, his slave. She no longer pleased him, and only the lingering force of habit made him tolerate her. He was so bored that Madame de Mailly wished to divert him at any cost. She had a sister younger than herself, Pauline Félicité, who had completed her education, but still remained at the convent for economical reasons. The young girl, who was not at all religiously inclined, considered herself a prisoner. She champed at her bit. Witty, ambitious, burning to play a part, the splendors of the chateau of Versailles constantly appealed to her imagination. "I, also, would like to amuse myself." The good-natured Mailly was not alarmed by the thought of a rival. She supposed her sister would be a precious ally, and that since a new-comer was absolutely necessary in the cabinets, it would be better that this new-comer should belong to the De Nesle family. Félicité would dispel the King's melancholy. The little suppers would no longer have a funereal air.

Louis XV. would cheer up; the situation would be saved. Madame de Mailly showed the King the beseeching letters in which her young sister spoke of Versailles as an Eldorado, the kingdom of her dreams. To be summoned to court seemed to her supreme happiness. Louis XV., flattered by so ardent a desire, granted it. Mademoiselle de Nesle arrived at Versailles in December, 1738, and acted at first as her sister's companion. She pleased the King at once by her more than lively character and her school-girlish good-humor. She was present at all the parties and suppers, and it appears that Louis XV. made her his mistress in 1739. He thought afterwards of finding her a husband.

The sovereign who thus glided over the declivity of scandal was, nevertheless, not without remorse, and his melancholy increased along with his vices. When the Holy Week of 1739 arrived, he felt a secret anguish which troubled him profoundly. This remark of Massillon's was realized: "The crime which you pursue with such appetite, afterwards pursues you like a cruel vulture, fastening upon and rending your heart to punish you for the pleasure it has given you."[1]

Corrupt as he was, Louis XV. had faith. He suffered, because he acted against his conscience, and his conscience spoke louder than all his flatterers. The more adulation they gave him the

[1] Massillon, Sermon on *l'Evidence de la loi.*

more dissatisfied was he with himself. Nothing is so sad as the condition of a man who believes but does not practise, who is present at divine service, who kneels before the altar, who prays or tries to pray, and yet who does not amend his life. The ceremonies of religion, so touching and poetic, are then no longer consolations. They are torments. Remorse pursues him everywhere. The chants of the Church, if they are sad, increase his disquietude. If they are joyous, their gladness brings them into contrast with the bitterness of his heart. The soul feels that it can nevermore rejoice. Occasionally he conceives a horror of the woman who turns him from his duty; she appears to him for what she is: his enemy, his bad angel. Then the habit of vice resumes its sway. Remorse is stilled for awhile. Holy Week has gone by. But the wound remains at the bottom of his heart, profound, incurable.

Louis XV. dared not communicate in 1739. He had been told of sacrilegious men, who, receiving the Host in their mouths, and thus "eating and drinking their own damnation," had fallen stiff and dead. This made him reflect, and when the grand provost asked whether he would touch for the king's evil, which the Kings of France cannot do until after they have received Communion, he drily answered: No. A King of France who does not make his Easter duty, a son of St. Louis who conducts himself like a disciple of Voltaire, what a scandal! Concerning this, Barbier the advocate,

writes in his *Journal:* "It is dangerous for a king to give such an example to his people; we are on good enough terms with the Pope for the Son of the Church to have a dispensation to make his Easter communion, no matter in what state he is, without sacrilege and with a safe conscience." Strange manner of comprehending religion! The impression made on the court was deplorable in this century apparently so incredulous. D'Argenson himself affirms this. He says: "They tried to hide the indecency by a Low Mass which Cardinal de Rohan should say in the cabinet of the King, Père de Linières being present; the fact that His Majesty had not presented himself either at the tribunal of Penance or to receive the Eucharist would be carefully concealed."

Some months later (September 23, 1739) the King arranged a marriage for Mademoiselle de Nesle. He had her espouse the Count de Vintimille, and deigned to give the husband the bridal shirt with his own royal hand. This was the first time that Louis XV. had thus honored any one. Madame de Vintimille was the only woman to whom he gave any presents on New Year's Day, 1740. But the new favorite was not much the richer for them. The monarch, afterwards so prodigal, was at this time more than economical. The countess applied to him at least half of what was said of the Czar Peter when he was in France: "He makes love like a street-porter, and pays in the same way." The

Marquis de Nesle, father of the royal mistresses, remained in a very embarrassed pecuniary position; in November, 1739, he had been suddenly banished to Lisieux, in spite of the credit of his daughters, for having spoken scornfully of "his wretched suit against his wretched creditors." D'Argenson grows indignant at such severity. He says: "They will have it that the King has performed a Roman action, worthy of Manlius Torquatus and Brutus, in punishing severely his natural and actual father-in-law for a slight offence given to a simple member of the council. This has astonished everybody, for, as a matter of fact, one puts himself under obligations in love, especially when one is king, and has a continuous attachment for one of his subjects."

At the close of 1740, Madame de Vintimille became pregnant. People said that Louis XV. had more than one reason to be interested in the favorite's condition. Perhaps he fancied that he was going to taste family joys along with her. Vain hope. Apart from pure sentiments and legitimate affections there are only disappointments and chagrins. Madame de Vintimille was brought to bed with a boy in August, 1741. The King went three or four times a day to inquire about her. He embraced the child with transports. The mother seemed at the height of favor. But the chastisement of Heaven overtook the fault at once. Madame de Vintimille was seized with miliary fever, and died September 9, in atrocious torments, without having

had time to receive the sacraments. Louis XV. was dismayed. He felt himself guilty of this death in the sight of God and men. The lover had involuntarily been the executioner. He felt himself overwhelmed by the weight of an implacable malediction, and, horrified at himself, he besought pardon of the dead woman and of God. If he tried to speak, sobs impeded his utterance and he relapsed into silence. Sick and despairing in his bed, he had Mass said in his chamber, and people began to wonder whether he would not seek a remedy for his remorse in asceticism. Madame de Mailly, forgetting the rival in the sister, went to pray every day beside Madame de Vintimille's tomb, and it was in memory of his second mistress that Louis XV. returned to the first one. She had the advantage of being able to weep with him, and he could make her the confidant of his grief.

VII

THE DISGRACE OF THE COUNTESS DE MAILLY

LOUIS XV. wept for Madame de Vintimille in company with Madame de Mailly. But those who thought him inconsolable little knew his character; his schemes of conversion were but passing caprices. He had not force enough to break the long chain of his iniquities. He was not merely not recalled to well-doing by the lamentable death of Madame de Vintimille, but he fell back into the paths of scandal with a promptitude which had not even the excuse of passion.

Madame de Mailly was still the acknowledged favorite, but the King had not loved her for a long time. She spent another year at court after the death of Madame de Vintimille. This was a year of sorrow, humiliations, and afflictions. Louis XV. caused the poor deserted woman to drink the chalice of bitterness to the dregs, and made her so unhappy that even the Queen took pity on her.

What is more lamentable than the last agonies of love? To perceive that one has been mistaken; that the being one has thought good, generous, and

grateful is wicked, perfidious, and ungrateful; to find hardness instead of mildness, egotism instead of devotion; what an awakening! what a torture! And one cannot complain. Morality, decorum, religion, all command silence. If you groan, the world scoffs at you. Your afflictions obtain scorn and not compassion. You cannot confess your sorrow before either God or men. The being who persecutes and outrages you, who betrays and kills you, is still beloved, and this love, alas! is only a folly, a weakness. You humble yourself, you crawl, you cringe. And all that avails you nothing. Your cause is lost. Nothing is left you but to suffer and to die.

Such was the destiny of Madame de Mailly. To lose the heart of the King was not enough. It was reserved to her to find not merely a rival but a persecutor in her own sister, Madame de la Tournelle.

Marie Anne de Mailly-Nesle, afterwards so well-known under the title of Duchess de Châteauroux, was the fifth and youngest daughter of the Marquis de Nesle. Born in 1717, she married, in 1734, the Marquis de la Tournelle, an extremely pious young man, who spent the greater part of his modest fortune in alms. Becoming a widow in 1740, at the age of twenty-two, she took refuge with her relative, the Duchess de Mazarin, lady of the bedchamber to the Queen, who died two years later. Madame de Tournelle was again on the point of being without an asylum. But the King had already remarked her beauty. She was appointed lady of the palace to the Queen

(September, 1742). M. de Maurepas and Cardinal Fleury, who disliked her and already had a presentiment that she would be their all-powerful enemy, made ruthless war upon her. But she had for adviser the most audacious and wily of all the courtiers of Louis XV., the Duke de Richelieu.

The Marquis d'Argenson draws the following portrait of this personage, so celebrated in the erotic annals of the eighteenth century: —

"He carries too far the opinion one ought to have of the defects of the monarchy and the feebleness of our epoch. . . . He has made himself talked of ever since he was twelve years old. He has been put into the Bastille three times for three causes capable of making a court hero illustrious: for having made love to the Dauphiness, the King's mother; for a duel, and for a conspiracy against the State. His love for voluptuous pleasures has ostentation rather than actual enjoyment as its end. . . . He is very much the mode among women; the pretensions and jealousies of coquettes have procured him many favors. There is never any passion in him but plenty of debauchery. He has betrayed a feeble sex; he has taken the senses for the heart. He is not fortunate enough to possess a friend. He is frank through thoughtlessness, suspicious through subtlety and contempt of mankind, disobliging through insensibility and misanthropy. Such is the sorry model copied by a gay and inconsiderate nation like ours."

The Duke de Richelieu intended to reign under cover of Madame de la Tournelle, whose guide and inspirer he had become. This affair roused his enthusiasm. Pushing even to lyricism his sorry rôle of intermediary, he exclaimed, in an excess of zeal: "I mean that any one who shall enter Madame de la Tournelle's antechamber shall be more highly considered than one who might have been in private conversation with Madame de Mailly."[1]

The new favorite made conditions before yielding to the King. Proud and imperious, like most beautiful and flattered women, she required guarantees, and transformed a so-called affair of the heart into a diplomatic negotiation. "Love," says La Rochefoucauld, "lends its name to an infinite number of relations attributed to it, but with which it has no more to do than the Doge with what goes on at Venice." Madame de la Tournelle did not love, she calculated. More peremptory than Madame de Vintimille, who had tolerated a partnership with Madame de Mailly, she determined to reign alone. What she bargained for was not simply money and consideration but the banishment of her sister. But this was not easy to be obtained. The idea of quitting Versailles afflicted Madame de Mailly. She made herself so humble, so modest, so resigned, so submissive, that Louis XV. felt unable to dismiss her. From time to time he still felt for her certain returns if not of attachment

[1] Memoirs of the Duke de Luynes.

at least of compassion. He would have liked to keep near him, as a faithful servant, this poor woman, whose gentleness and kindness he could not refuse to acknowledge. But Madame de la Tournelle was inflexible. She had signified her intention not to become the mistress of the King until after Madame de Mailly should have been irrevocably driven from the court.

Weakness makes men cruel. Louis XV., ordinarily affable and kind, was about to be severe beyond measure towards his former mistress. She thought to move him by immolating herself, and resigning her place (November, 1742) as lady of the palace to the Queen in favor of her sister, Madame de Flavacourt, who stood well with Madame de la Tournelle. But this sacrifice did not touch the cold heart of the King, and he took pleasure in reducing to despair the woman whose love had become embarrassing and tiresome.

The Duke de Luynes does not disguise his sympathy for the fallen favorite. "Her condition," he says, "is all the more worthy of compassion, because she really loves the King, and is as zealous for his glory as she is attached to his person. She has many friends, and deservedly, for she has never done any harm, and, on the contrary, has been anxious to be of service. . . . They pretend that the King said to her some days ago: 'I have promised you to speak plainly with you. I am madly in love with Madame de la Tournelle.' Madame de la Tournelle says she

is loved by M. d'Agenois, and that she loves him, and has no desire to have the King; that he would please her by letting her alone, and that she will never consent to his proposals but on sure and advantageous conditions."

Everybody pitied Madame de Mailly: Cardinal Fleury because she had never meddled with politics; women because she was not beautiful; courtiers because she had been serviceable. The Queen was not one of the least affected. She displayed great good-will toward a mistress who had had as much modesty as tact. "The Queen," says the Duke de Luynes, "seems to sympathize with Madame de Mailly's situation, and to desire that she shall be well treated."

D'Argenson is indignant with the faithless monarch. The previous year he had been unwilling to believe in the double passion of Louis XV. for Madame de Mailly and Madame de Vintimille. He wrote at the time: "They are the two most united sisters that ever were seen. . . . What likelihood is there that they could remain friends if they were disputing the possession of a heart so illustrious and precious? . . . But people are never willing to believe anything but evil." At this period, D'Argenson did not doubt the sincerity of his master's remorse. "The death of Madame de Vintimille," said he, "will bring back the King to the practice of religion. . . . He will come in the end to living with Madame de Mailly as the Duke, they

say, lived with Madame d'Egmont, simply as a friend, relapsing, if at all, only by accident, and then going quickly to confession. . . . He has a heart which makes itself heard. How few of his subjects have such a one at present! He is grateful for the sincere attachment shown towards him. He likes kind hearts; he is, perhaps, destined to be the delight of the world."

A year later, the Marquis is furious at having been duped. "Great news!" he exclaims. "The King has dismissed Madame de Mailly in order to take her sister, Madame de la Tournelle. This was done with inconceivable harshness on the part of the Most Christian King. It is the sister who drives away the sister; she demands her exile, and the taking of this third sister as a mistress makes many people believe that the second one, Madame de Vintimille, went the same way. I, for my part, have always maintained that the King's extreme sensibility at the death of Madame de Vintimille was a praiseworthy sentiment toward the sister of his friend, whose marriage he had himself arranged. But farewell to virtuous sensibility! So he deceived his mistress, he bound Madame de Vintimille to ingratitude! He considers the child she left as his son, and often has it brought secretly to his room. It is all cleared up, then. Who has the third sister must have had the second."

Madame de Mailly made no further attempt at resistance. "My sacrifices are consummated," she

exclaimed; "I shall die of them; but this evening I shall be in Paris." She actually departed, in tears and despairing, almost frenzied, in November, 1742. The King wrote letter after letter to her to tell her — could one believe it? — about his love for Madame de la Tournelle. This time, he said, he was "fixed forever, Madame de la Tournelle having all the mind necessary to make her charming." The fickle sovereign congratulated himself in this more than strange correspondence on "the general applause given to his choice."

The new favorite triumphed with a barbarous joy. The De Goncourt brothers, in their well-written and interesting book on the *Mistresses of Louis XV.*,[1] have given the curious letter she wrote at this time to the Duke de Richelieu, her confidant: —

"Surely Meuse must have let you know what trouble I have had to oust Madame de Mailly; at last I have managed to have her sent away not to come back again. You fancy perhaps that the affair is ended? Not at all; he is beside himself with grief, and does not write me a letter without speaking of it, and begging me to let her return, and he will never approach her, but only ask me to see her sometimes. I have just received one in which he says that if I refuse I shall soon be rid of both her and him; meaning, apparently, that they will both die

[1] *Les Maitresses de Louis XV.*, par Edmond et Jules de Goncourt. 2 vols. Firmin-Didot.

of chagrin. As it would by no means suit me to have her here, I mean to be firm. . . . The King has sent you word that the affair is concluded between us, for he tells me, in this morning's letter, to undeceive you, because he is unwilling to have you think anything beyond the truth. It is true that, when he wrote you, he counted on its being concluded this evening; but I put some difficulties in the way of that which I do not repent of."

Before the close of the year, the affair was settled. Madame de Mailly, after many tears and supplications, recognized that she was beaten. The King paid her debts, and granted her a pension of ten thousand livres in addition to the twelve thousand she had already, and furnished a house for her in Paris, rue Saint-Thomas-du-Louvre, where she established herself. Thenceforward, Madame de la Tournelle fulfilled, uncontested and without a rival, the official functions of King's mistress.

VIII

THE REIGN OF THE DUCHESS DE CHÂTEAUROUX

IF Louis XV. is a degenerate Louis XIV., his mistresses are likewise inferior to those of the great King. Madame de Mailly, spite of her mildness and her repentance, is not a La Vallière. Though Madame de la Tournelle may become Duchess de Châteauroux, she will never be a Montespan, notwithstanding her ambition and her arrogance. She is doubtless pretty; her big blue eyes, her dazzling white skin, her expression both passionate and arch, make a charming woman of her. But she is not a mistress "thundering and triumphant," as Madame de Sevigné said of Madame de Montespan; she is not that type of favorite who is "good to display before the ambassadors." In spite of her high birth, and her schemes for domination, there will always be something mean about her, and the same is true of Louis XV. himself.

She had scarcely become the royal mistress when Cardinal Fleury died (January, 1743). When Mazarin died, Louis XIV. had said: At last I am King. Louis XV. will content himself with saying:

Now I am prime minister. He need no longer dread his former preceptor's lessons on morality and parsimony. He is the master. But he does not at once renounce his economical habits, and at first Madame de la Tournelle has trouble in extracting money from him. "It must be owned," writes the Duke de Luynes in April, 1743, "that the present arrangement does not resemble what was announced at the commencement of Madame de la Tournelle's favor. . . . They said she would make no engagement unless she were assured of a house of her own, her provisions, means to entertain people, and a carriage for her private use, being unwilling to use those of the King. It is true, she does not use these, but she has none of her own; hence, she never goes out, though she is fond of spectacles."

She ended by making her lover less miserly. In October, 1743, he gave her an excellent cook, an equerry, a berline, six carriage horses, and, finally, the title of Duchess de Châteauroux, with an estate bringing an income of eighty-five thousand livres. The letters patent were worded as follows: "The right to confer titles of honor and dignity being one of the most sublime attributes of supreme power, the kings, our predecessors, have left to us divers monuments of the use they have made of it in favor of persons whose virtues and merit they desired to make illustrious. . . . Considering that our very dear and well-beloved cousin, Marie Anne de Mailly, widow of the Marquis de la Tournelle, issues from

one of the greatest families of our realm, allied to our own and to the most ancient in Europe; that for several centuries her ancestors have rendered great and important services to our crown; that she is attached as lady of the palace to the Queen, our very dear companion, and that she joins to these advantages all the virtues and the most excellent qualities of heart and mind which have gained for her a just esteem and universal consideration, we have thought proper to give her the duchy of Châteauroux, with its appurtenances and dependencies, situated in Berry."

Parliament was assembled to record these letters patent. "The assembly," says the Marquis d'Argenson, "has listened gravely to all these flowers of speech which the monarch presents to his mistress, and has decided on the registration." Barbier, that faithful echo of contemporary public opinion, makes certain observations on the subject in his journal which are not altogether lacking in malice. "These letters," says he, "are very honorable for the Mailly family. The King declares that it is one of the greatest and finest illustrious houses of the realm, allied to his own and to the most ancient of Europe. One reflection occurs at once: it is surprising that no one has yet decorated the males with the title of duke, and that this celebrity begins with the women. There might be something to criticise in the preamble to the letters; present circumstances considered, the author has not been prudent; the crying them

through the streets might also have been dispensed with, it having given occasion for talk."

Behold Madame de la Tournelle Duchess de Châteauroux. She is officially presented in this quality to the Queen, who says to her, in a kindly way: "Madame, I compliment you on the grace accorded to you by the King." The Duke de Richelieu is rewarded for his zeal by the post of first gentleman of the chamber. The new duchess thrones it at Versailles. She keeps two of her sisters near her, the Marquise de Flavacourt, who is, like herself, one of the Queen's ladies of the palace, and the Duchess de Lauraguais, of whom she makes an assiduous companion. Neither of them is pretty enough to make her jealous. She uses them as allies. Louis XV. isolates himself in the society of these three women, who have combined to keep him under the yoke. He amuses himself by giving them nicknames. He calls Madame de Flavacourt the Hen, on account of her frightened air, and the Duchess de Lauraguais *la Rue des Mauvaises-Paroles*, on account of her caustic speeches.

Could anything great or noble proceed from this coterie? Is it true, that, as the Goncourts have said, "Madame de Châteauroux unites the energies and ambitions of a Longueville to the ardors and haughty insolence of a Montespan?" Is it true that in her pride, her impatience, the fever of her desires, the activity of her projects, the passion of her spirit, she has the fire of a "Fronde as well as the

soul of a great reign?" We do not believe it. To judge from the Memoirs of the Duke de Luynes, so impartial a witness, so exact a narrator, the Duchess de Châteauroux was not a political woman, and still less a heroine. He depicts her as dull, indolent, taciturn, bored. "She and her sister," he says, "spend the day in an armchair; and except in her week, Madame de Lauraguais generally goes out for the first time at eight or nine o'clock in the evening. . . . The King is with the two sisters as often as possible, and it appears that there is never any question of important matters between the three. Madame de Mailly would not have been so indifferent."

And yet France had been at war with Austria since 1741, and England since 1742, and people were amazed that Louis XV., then in his prime, had not yet put himself at the head of his troops. One must do him the justice to admit that he was brave, and that, like all his ancestors, he had the sentiment of military honor. He comprehended that longer inaction on his part would be inexcusable, and that his place was with the army. Marshal de Noailles, whom he had chosen for his private adviser, at last decided him on making his first campaign. But not without difficulty. Louis XV. hesitated for more than a year, and the dread of leaving his mistress for several days was not one of the least causes of his perplexity. The Marshal tried to appeal to the royal instincts of his master. "France," he wrote him, "has never beheld reigns fortunate for the

people nor veritably glorious for the kings, except those in which they governed by themselves. . . . A king is never so great as when he is at the head of his armies."[1] On his side, Louis XV. wrote to the Marshal, July 24, 1743: "I can assure you I have an extreme desire to know for myself a profession my fathers have practised so well." And August 9: "If they are going to devour my country, it will be very hard for me to see it crunched without personally doing my utmost to prevent it."

It was believed the King was at last going to set off; but the Duchess de Châteauroux wanted to be able to follow him. Far from comprehending how ridiculous the presence of a court of women would seem to the army, she intrigued to obtain a favorable opinion of the strange desire she cherished from her friend, the Marshal de Noailles. In a letter dated September 3, 1743, she said to him: "I agree that the King should start for the army: there is not a moment to lose, and it should be done promptly; what is to become of me? Would it be impossible for my sister and me to follow him, and if we cannot go to the army with him, at least to post ourselves where we can hear from him every day? . . . I think it well to tell you that I have asked the King to let me write you concerning this, and that I do so with his approbation."

[1] Correspondence of Louis XV. and the Marshal de Noailles, published by M. Camille Rousset. 2 vols. Dumont.

Evidently Louis XV. was not going to make a campaign without his mistress. Nevertheless, the Duke de Noailles was frank enough to reply to the favorite: "I do not think, madame, that you can follow the King with madame, your sister. You, yourself, feel the inconveniences of it, since you afterwards reduce your demands to asking whether you could not come to some town near enough to receive daily news from His Majesty. . . . I cannot avoid telling you that both the King and yourself would need some plausible reason to justify such a step in the eyes of the public." The result of this letter was to defer the military inclinations of the monarch. He gave up the autumn campaign of 1743, and did not start for the seat of war until the following spring, May 2, 1744.

IX

THE JOURNEY TO METZ

AT last Louis XV. is at the head of his troops. There is a burst of enthusiasm as soon as he appears at the northern frontier. He is thirty-four years old, has a fine bearing and an expression at once kindly and dignified. He sits a horse well and makes an excellent figure in front of the regiments. He is present at the siege of Menin, and people lavish praises on him. He has gone through the trenches, he has visited the ambulances, he has tasted the broth of the invalids and the bread of the soldiers. Everybody cries: "He is a warrior! he is a father! he is a king!" He has brought his chaplain with him, Monseigneur de Fitz-James, Bishop of Soissons, to give him the last sacraments if required, and his confessor, Père Pérusseau, to give him absolution in case he is in danger of death. There are no women in camp. The Duchesses of Châteauroux and Lauraguais have shown themselves at the opera to prove they have not followed the sovereign. Things are going on well. There is not the least scandal. Menin opens its gates June 4. Fireworks are set

off at the Hôtel-de-Ville in Paris. The *Te Deum* is chanted in every church in France. Universal joy and confidence prevail.

But presently a dark cloud appears in this clear sky. Louis XV. is bored at the army as he was at Versailles. *Post equitem sedet atra cura.* He misses Madame de Châteauroux, and prefers the women's jokes to the reports of his generals. The favorite is likewise uneasy; she fancies that the warrior will deteriorate the lover; she fears for her position. "In truth, dear uncle," she writes, June 3, to the Duke de Richelieu, "I was not made for things like these, and from time to time I am seized by terrible discouragements. I am so naturally averse to it all that I must have been a great fool to have meddled with it. However, it is done, and I must have patience; I am persuaded that everything will turn out according to my wishes."

Madame de Châteauroux is absolutely determined to rejoin the King. But how is it to be done? There is not a single woman with the army. If she should be the first one to arrive, the scandal would be much too great. A princess of the blood, the Duchess de Chartres, gives the example; she sets off under pretext of her husband's fall from a horse. Directly Mesdames de Châteauroux and de Lauraguais follow suit. June 6 they have the impudence to come and say good by to the Queen, who carries long-suffering so far as to invite them both to supper.

"One cannot sufficiently praise," says the Duke

de Luynes in noting the fact, "the courtesy she displays to all the men and women who come to pay court to her."

Two days afterward the pair of duchesses leave Versailles by night. The King receives them at Lille, and then goes to take the city of Ypres. Madame de Châteauroux carries fatuity so far as to attribute this success to herself. June 25 she wrote from Lille to the Duke de Richelieu: "You know how ready I always am to see everything in rose-color, and that I think my star, which I rely on, and which is not a bad one, has influence on everything. It answers instead of good generals and ministers. He has never done so well as in placing himself under its direction." Thus, as is plainly evident, Madame de Châteauroux considers herself as the King's directress.

A thing painful to admit, because it shows so clearly the demoralization of the period, is that the Marquis d'Argenson finds this ridiculous and scandalous journey quite natural. He writes in his Memoirs, June 30, 1744: "The King has begun to show himself at the head of the army. It must be owned that this conduct is in good taste. Some people claim that it is a stain on his glory to have brought his mistress to the army, thus dishonoring the princesses and great people who came with him. Surely there is some prejudice in such a reproach. For why, in fact, should he deny himself pleasures which harm nobody? The Flemish are superstitious.

They have been told that the King has had three sisters; they are scandalized to see these two arrive at Lille. Two hours afterward a barracks took fire, and they said it was caused by fire from heaven."

Barbier is not quite so indulgent, but he pleads extenuating circumstances. "The public," says he, "does not find this journey to its taste. . . . Nevertheless it is just to say that a decent appearance is given it by the concourse of three princesses of the blood and a number of ladies who are all supposed to have gone thither to keep company with Madame the Duchess de Chartres, who had a legitimate excuse for going to the army."

The people, who have the veritable moral instinct, are more just and more severe. They are indignant. The soldiers jeer at the two duchesses. The Queen is pitied and the favorite detested. While all this is going on, Alsace is invaded, and Louis XV. goes to Metz, dragging after him his train of women like an Asiatic monarch. On the way Madame de Châteauroux falls sick at Rheims. The King thinks she is going to die, and begins to consider where she shall be buried and what sort of mausoleum he shall build for her. It is only a vain alarm. The favorite speedily recovers and goes to join the King at Metz. She establishes herself and her sister in the Abbey of Saint Arnould, and a long wooden gallery is constructed to put the abbey in communication with the palace where Louis XV. is quartered. Four streets are closed for this purpose. The people murmur.

In order to quiet them, an effort is made to persuade them that the only purpose of this wooden gallery is to make it easier for the monarch to be present at Mass.

All at once a sinister rumor gets about. The King has fallen ill on August 4. His life is in danger. He thinks he has but a few moments before he must appear before God. All his religious sentiments revive. He wishes to make his confession; but the departure of Madame de Châteauroux is indispensable for that, and Louis XV., always weak, has not courage to dismiss her. He adjourns his confession under the pretext that he needs a little time in which to recollect all his faults. His mistress approaches his bed. He wants to kiss her hand. Then, thinking better of it, he says: "Ah! Princess, I think I am doing wrong; perhaps we shall have to separate." Madame de Châteauroux parleys with the Jesuit Pérusseau. She implores him not to have her driven away. She swears she will no longer be the King's mistress, but only his friend. But the Jesuit is firm. Bishop Fitz-James behaves like an apostle; he says frankly to the King: "Sire, the laws of the Church and our holy canons forbid us to bring the Viaticum so long as the concubine is still in the city. I pray Your Majesty to give new orders for her departure, because there is no time to lose. Your Majesty will soon die!" Louis XV. hesitates no longer; the libertine disappears; the devotee alone remains. "I made my first commun-

ion twenty-two years ago," he says to the Bishop; "I wish to make a good one now and let it be the last. Ah! how unworthy I have been up to this day of royalty. What accounts a king must render who is about to appear before God!" Louis XV. receives extreme unction. Bishop Fitz-James, who administers it, turns toward the spectators and addresses them in these words: "Gentlemen the princes of the blood, and you, nobles of the realm, the King charges Monseigneur the Bishop of Metz and me to acquaint you with his sincere repentance for the scandal he has caused in his kingdom by living as he has done with Madame de Châteauroux. He has learned that she is only three leagues from here, and he orders her not to come within fifty leagues of the court. His Majesty deprives her of her post." "And her sister also," adds the King.

Could one believe it? This noble and Christian conduct of Bishop Fitz-James finds detractors. Barbier writes in his journal: "People hereabouts regard the action of the Bishop of Soissons as the finest thing in the world. The public often admire the greatest events without reflection. For my part, I take the liberty of considering this conduct very indecent, and this public reparation as an open scandal. The reputation of a king ought to be respected, and he should be allowed to die with the rites of religion, but with dignity and majesty. What is the good of this ecclesiastical parade? It was enough for the King to have interiorly a sincere

repentance for what he had done without making a display of it."

All France is affected. It is rumored that the King's malady was caused by his grief at the invasion of Alsace. His kindness, his repentance, his courage, his patriotism, are everywhere celebrated. Masses are said for him in every church in the kingdom. The clergy read from the pulpits the bulletins from Metz and accounts of the King's public penance. People speak of him with tears of tenderness and admiration. As for his favorite, the "Lady in red," as the people call her, she is loaded with maledictions. The Queen is sent for to Metz. She leaves Versailles August 15, amidst universal emotion. When she reaches her spouse, he receives her with tenderness. He embraces her and asks pardon for the pain he has given her.

The next day Louis XV. has Madame de Villais waked up at four o'clock in the morning. He knows the Queen has great confidence in her, and he wants her to tell him if Marie Leczinska has really forgiven him. He expresses the most beautiful sentiments, begging God, as he says, to withdraw him from the world if his people would be governed better by some one else. His convalescence begins a few days later. The Queen is full of joy; she thinks her husband has become a saint. But here we leave the narrative to the Duchess de Brancas, a witness of the hopes and the disappointments of Marie Leczinska: —

"The old court," she says in a curious fragment of Memoirs, "found small difficulty in convincing itself that God, after striking the King, would touch his heart. The maid-of-honor was so devoutly persuaded of this one day that, finding the King in such a condition that he could give the Queen indubitable marks of a sincere reconciliation, she had the Queen's bed changed into a nuptial couch and put two pillows over the bolster. You can understand what hopes were revealed, by the joy of some people and the astonishment of others. The Queen had been wonderfully well dressed since the King's convalescence; she wore rose-colored gowns. The old ladies announced their hopes by green ribbons; in fact, there had been nothing so spirituelle in toilet adornments seen for a long time; one was reminded of ancient gallantry by the way in which they were relied on to announce everything without compromising anybody. But you can also conceive the pleasure which the Duke de Bouillon and the Duke de Richelieu took in speaking to the King about what was going on in the Queen's palace. He seemed so dissatisfied with it that these gentlemen thought they would not displease him by notifying the mothers of the churches that they had been mistaken in getting ready a *Te Deum* which they would never chant, and that nothing was more uncertain than the King's conversion. This was quite enough to decide these ladies to change their toilette. Some assumed more modest colors, others lowered their headdresses, still others wore less rouge."

The Duke de Richelieu, that Mephistopheles of Louis XV., had prophesied correctly. When he was sick, the King was a saint. When he was well, he once more became a debauchee. A sort of human respect made him blush at his momentary conversion to virtue. He felt there was something ridiculous in his repentance. He bore a grudge against his confessor, his chaplain, and all those who had given him good advice. The love of his people, far from touching his heart, dissatisfied him, because these loyal and faithful subjects had had the audacity not to kneel before the Duchess de Châteauroux. He took offence at the respect showed to the Queen, and considered the priests who had prayed so well for him almost as adversaries of his royal authority. Poor Marie Leczinska's illusions were soon dispelled. When Louis XV. was about to leave Metz, she tremblingly asked his permission to follow him to Saverne and to Strasburg. "It is not worth while," he responded in a dry tone. The Queen went away in despair. The heart she thought she had regained had finally escaped her.

X

THE DEATH OF THE DUCHESS DE CHÂTEAUROUX

WHAT has become of Madame de Châteauroux? How is she bearing her humiliations and her disgrace? We left her at Metz at the moment when, driven away ignominiously by the Bishop of Soissons, treated as an accursed wretch by the people, overwhelmed by the anathemas of the public conscience, she with great difficulty procured a carriage from Marshal de Belle-Isle in which to return to Paris. Her flight had been painful. She only escaped rough treatment by taking by-roads and going through several villages in disguise and on foot. However, she had not yet submitted. From Bar-le-Duc she wrote to M. de Richelieu:[1] "I can well believe that so long as the King's head is feeble he will be in a state of great devotion; but as soon as he is a little better, I bet I shall trot furiously through his head, and that in the end he will not be able to resist, and will quietly ask Lebel and Bachelier what has become of me."

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[1] *Lettres autographes de la duchesse de Châteauroux. Bibliothèque de Rouen.*

In the same letter the fallen favorite speaks of herself with admiring complacency. "So long as the King is living," she says, "all the torments they want to inflict on me must be borne with patience. If he recovers, I shall affect him the more on that account, and he will feel the more obliged to make me a public reparation. If he dies, I am not the sort of person to humiliate myself, even if I could gain the kingdom of France by it. Up to now I have conducted myself with dignity; I shall always preserve that inclination; it is the only way to make myself respected, to win back the public and retain the consideration I deserve." Can one be amazed at the illusions cherished by certain kings when a mere royal mistress has her eyes so thickly bandaged?

Debility succeeded to fever. Sometimes Madame de Châteauroux, intoxicated with pride and vengeance, fancied she was about to resume arrogantly the left-handed sceptre which had just slipped through her fingers; sometimes she cast a disdainful glance at the sorry spectacle of the human comedy, and talked of abandoning everything. She wrote from Sainte-Ménehould to the Duke de Richelieu (August 18, 1744): "All this is very terrible and gives me a furious disgust for the place I lived in despite myself, and, far from desiring to return there some day, as you believe, I am persuaded that even if they wished it I could never consent. All I desire, meanwhile, is that the affront offered me shall be repaired, and not to be dishonored. That, I assure

you, is my sole ambition. . . . Ah! my God, what does all this amount to? I give you my word it is all over so far as I am concerned. I would have to be a great fool to go into it again; and you know how little I was flattered and dazzled by all the grandeurs, and that if I had had my own way, I would not have been there; but the thing is done; I must resign myself and think no more about it."

These be sage reflections. But the favorite's philosophy lasted no longer than the King's repentance. La Rochefoucauld says in his maxims: "The intelligence of the majority of women serves rather to fortify their folly than their reason." Hardly had she reached Paris when the Duchess felt all her ambitious spites and rages rekindle to new life. She wrote to the Duke de Richelieu: "You have good reason to say it would be fine to make the day of the Dupes come round again; for me, I don't doubt, it is all the same a Thursday; but patience is needed, — in fact, a great deal of patience. All you have been told about the remarks made at Paris is very true; you could hardly believe how far they have gone; if you had been there at the time, you would have been torn to pieces. . . . I tell you we shall get through it, and I am persuaded it will be a very fine moment; I should like to be there now, as you can easily believe."

Evidently, renunciation of earthly vanities was already far in the background. The Duchess wrote again to Richelieu, September 13: "I hope the

King's sickness has not taken away his memory. No one but me has known his heart thus far, and I assure you he has a very good one, very capable of sentiments. I don't deny that there is something a little singular along with all that, but it does not get the upper hand. He will remain devout, but not a bigot; I love him ten times better; I will be his friend, and then I shall be beyond attack. All that these scamps have done during his illness will only make my destiny more fortunate and secure. I shall no longer have to fear either changes, sickness, or the devil, and we shall lead a delicious life. . . . Adieu, dear uncle, keep yourself well. For my part, I am really thinking of getting a health like a porter's, so as to enrage our enemies as long as I can and have time to ruin them; that will happen, you may rely on it."

Meanwhile all this was accompanied by moral and physical sufferings, convulsions, nervous attacks, inquietudes, and agonizing pains. With her ecstasies and self-abasements, her alternatives of pride and humility, folly and clear-sightedness, ardor and disgust, illusions and discouragement, Madame de Châteauroux is the type of the passionate woman. There is nothing sadder than this correspondence, which is the confession of a soul. One lacks courage to be angry with these avowals so naïve in their immorality. To make such scandals possible a whole century must be corrupted. What one should accuse is not a woman, but an epoch.

Madame de Châteauroux understood the character of Louis XV. very well. She knew beforehand that he would come back to her. He had, in fact, but one idea, — to be reconciled with his mistress. He found camp life insupportable. He consented to witness the taking of Fribourg, but as soon as the city surrendered he returned in haste to Paris. He made his formal entry November 13, 1744, at six in the evening, in one of the coronation carriages. Triumphal arches had been erected with the inscription: *Ludovico redivivo et triumphatori.* The houses were filled to the roofs with applauding spectators. The monarch alighted at the palace of the Tuileries, where the nobles of the realm were drawn up in double line awaiting him. The next day he went with all the royal family to Notre Dame to render thanks to God. Madame de Châteauroux was hidden amongst the crowd. In the evening she wrote to Richelieu: "I have seen him; he looked joyful and affected, so he is capable of a tender sentiment. . . . A single voice near me recalled my misfortunes by naming me in a very offensive manner."

It was neither of his glory, his people, or of God that Louis XV. was thinking, as he came out of Notre Dame. Madame de Châteauroux still occupied his whole attention. She lived very near the Tuileries, in the rue de Bac. That night, when all was quiet in the palace, he crossed the Pont-Royal, and arrived unattended at the favorite's house, like a criminal who comes to entreat pardon. Madame

de Châteauroux received him with arrogance, and imposed severe conditions before absolving him. Louis XV. was ready to agree to everything except the dismissal of Maurepas, a useful and agreeable minister, who worked as well as amused himself, and who had the gift of making business easy. The King then returned to the Tuileries, and presently it was rumored that the Duchesses of Châteauroux and Lauraguais were about to reappear triumphantly at court. The people, who resemble the chorus in Greek tragedies, at once resumed their anathemas. "Since the King is going to take her back," cried the market-women, "he will never find another '*Pater*' on the streets of Paris."

The prudent Duke de Luynes was more circumspect in his speech. He said, apropos of the news of this return to favor: "It has been almost publicly spoken of all over Paris, and Versailles, where little is said ordinarily, has not been absolutely exempt from some remarks concerning it. However, as such remarks serve only to displease, and are moreover useless, those who are wisest have kept silence."

The thing was done, the arrangement concluded. There had been a compromise between the King and his mistress. Maurepas was not to leave the ministry, but it was he who was charged to bear the King's excuses to Madame de Châteauroux, rue de Bac, and an invitation to return to Versailles. The minister acquitted himself of this commission November 25. The Duchess, who was sick abed, replied

that as soon as she was able to get up she would comply with the King's orders. That evening she wrote to her friend the Duchess de Boufflers: "I rely too much on your friendship not to acquaint you at once with what concerns me. The King has just sent me word by M. de Maurepas, that he was very much offended by all that occurred at Metz, and the indecency with which I had been treated; that he begged me to forget it, and that, to give him a proof of my having done so, he hoped my sister and myself would have the kindness to resume our apartments at Versailles; that he would give us on all occasions tokens of his protection, his esteem, and his friendship, and that he would restore us to our positions."

So many emotions had prostrated Madame de Châteauroux. Joy revived her for awhile, but all was over with her; she was never again to see either the palace of Versailles, so greatly longed for, or the King whose love had been so fatal to her. She never left her bed again. A burning fever consumed her; she thought herself poisoned, and suffered horrible tortures in soul and body. Her worst enemies would have pitied her. Her agony lasted eleven days. She had a violent delirium accompanied by convulsive movements, and struggled against death with all the energy of her youth, all the vehemence of her character. In spite of his pretended passion, Louis XV. did not trouble himself to come and bid her adieu. He did not even send directly

to inquire about her. Madame de Lauraguais, who had just had a child, was not beside her sister's bed. The Duchess de Châteauroux died alone, December 8, 1744. The King deserted her; Jesus Christ did not forsake her. At her last hour, she repented like Magdalen, and for the first time in years, the dying sinner knew interior peace. "Père Ségand was with her," says the Duke de Luynes. "As he was speaking to her of the confidence we ought to have in the Blessed Virgin, she replied that she had always worn a little medal of her, and that she had begged two graces through her intercession, — not to die without the sacraments, and to die on one of her feasts. She had already obtained the first and was presently to obtain the second, for she died on the feast of the Conception."

At first Louis XV. felt crushed. The Queen herself, who practised on so great a scale the wholly Christian virtue of forgiveness of injuries, the Queen shared sincerely in her husband's grief. She passed in solitude the evening which had been set apart for a friendly reunion at the house of the Duchess de Luynes. During the night she became frightened, and summoned one of her women: "My God!" cried she, "that poor duchess! If she should return! . . . I think I see her." — "Eh! madame," returned the chambermaid, "if she comes back, it will not be Your Majesty that receives her first visit."

Barbier in his journal pities, not Madame de Châteauroux, as one might imagine, but Louis XV. He

says: "Judicious people praise his sensibility, which is the proof of a good character, but they fear for his health. The common herd are rather pleased than otherwise at this death; they would like to have the King unsentimental and take another one to-morrow." The Marquis d'Argenson writes to Richelieu: "Our poor master has a look which makes one tremble for his life." D'Argenson might reassure himself. Louis XV. was far too feeble to suffer a long sorrow. His emotions were keen but transitory. There was but one thing in his character which had any tenacity, and that was ennui. He belonged to the numerous family of egoists. Some of them weep a good deal, but console themselves quickly. Nothing was to be changed in the habits of the master. A few days more and the name of the Duchess de Châteauroux would be no more spoken. There was but one person who truly regretted her, and that was Madame de Mailly, the sister to whom she had shown herself so coldly and pitilessly cruel.

An impression of melancholy and sorrow is what remains from all this. What, in brief, was the fate of the three sisters chosen by royal caprice? One of them, the Countess de Vintimille, died in childbed at the age of twenty-eight, and her death was the direct consequence, the immediate chastisement, of her fault. Another, the Duchess de Châteauroux, breathed her last at the age of twenty-seven, the victim of excessive anguish and humiliation. Her favor, like that of Madame de Vintimille, had lasted

only two years. The third, the Countess de Mailly, better treated by Providence, since she had at least time for repentance, lived until she was forty. But her last years were merely one long immolation. She covered herself with ashes; she wore a hair shirt; and if, as she was on her way to church, any passer-by recognized and called her by some insulting name, she would say: "You know me — well, then, pray for me."

How ephemeral are the pleasures of courts! How sad its sensual enjoyments! How dearly one pays for these swift moments of illegitimate joy and false pride! Ah! I understand why Louis XV. should be dissatisfied with others and with himself. I understand his exhaustion, his discouragement, his remorse, and I am not amazed that, in spite of the clink of glasses, the glitter of chandeliers, and the perfume of flowers, the boudoirs of Versailles sometimes resembled sepulchres.

SECOND PART

[1745–1768]

MADAME DE POMPADOUR.

I

LOUIS XV. AND THE ROYAL FAMILY IN 1745

THE tragic end of the Duchess de Châteauroux should have inspired Louis XV. with some sage reflections. It was otherwise. At the end of a few weeks a new favorite installed herself in the apartment left vacant by the defunct. Before narrating the long reign of the Marquise de Pompadour, let us glance at the interior of the royal family at the moment when this woman, who was much rather a minister in petticoats than a mistress, and who unhappily personifies a whole epoch, came into favor.

In 1745 Louis XV. is thirty-five years old. From the physical point of view he is a model sovereign. His handsome face is characterized by an expression of benevolent grandeur and gentle majesty. A fine and sympathetic physiognomy, large blue eyes with an expressive and profound regard, an aquiline nose, a truly royal way of carrying his head, the most dignified attitude without the least appearance of stiffness, manners both elegant and simple, an agreeable and penetrating tone of voice, all contribute to give an exceptional charm to this king whom all

France surnames the Well-Beloved. He shows extreme politeness to all who approach him, and one might say that he seems to solicit the affection of those to whom he speaks. An accomplished gentleman, he is always calm, always well-bred. He is never irritated, never raises his voice. His domestics find him the easiest of masters. One day as he is getting ready to mount on horseback, somebody fetches him two boots for the same foot. He sits down quietly and contents himself with saying: "He who made the mistake is more annoyed than I am." [1] In general he is reserved, taciturn; he does not give himself away, but when he concludes to talk, his conversation is full of ingenious views and judicious remarks; he has wit and good sense.

In religious matters he is not a hypocrite; he belongs to that numerous class of Christians who retain both their vices and the faith. He goes to Mass every day. On Sundays and holy days he is also present at Vespers, Sermon, and Benediction. As the Marquis d'Argenson says, he "mutters his Paternosters and prayers in church with customary decency," and he is putting off to some future time his perfect conversion. When he is urged to eat meat in Lent for the sake of his health, he answers that one ought not to sin on all sides. At another time he is heard congratulating himself on his rheumatic pains, because, says he, his sufferings are an expiation

[1] Memoirs of the Duke de Luynes.

for his faults. One day when he is sending alms to a poor man, he exclaims: "Let this poor man ask God to show mercy to me, for I greatly need it." When the feasts of the Church draw near, they occupy his mind and disturb it; when he dares not communicate, through fear of sacrilege, his soul is filled with sadness, and the flatteries of his courtiers cannot give peace to his conscience.

His remorse takes the form of ennui. Dissatisfied with himself, he often reflects that he is endangering his salvation for so-called pleasures from which he frequently gains nothing but physical and moral fatigue, which are still harder to endure. Egotism does not prevent him from yielding to disgust. As is remarked by M. Capefigue himself, great admirer as he is of royal pleasures, the capital defect of the King's character is to allow the immense ennui which consumes him to become too evident. "He suffers the terrible chastisement imposed by satiety, that cold branding of both soul and body; he experiences the emptiness and impotence of sensuality."

Such also is the conclusion of the Goncourts in their fine work, *Les Maîtresses de Louis XV.* "Ennui," they say, "is the sovereign's evil genius. It strikes with impotence all his fortunate natural endowments; it ages, disarms, extinguishes his will, it stifles his conscience as well as his kingly appetites. Ennui is the private torturer of his sluggish existence, of his heavy hours. . . . So true is this that the story of a king's amours is also the story of the ennui of a man."

The Memoirs of the Duke de Luynes fully confirm this appreciation. He says in them: "The King's temperament is neither gay nor lively; it is even hypochondriacal. Details concerning maladies, operations, very often matters that concern anatomy, and questions about where one expects to be buried, are, unfortunately, the subjects of his ordinary conversation." "Where would you like to be buried?" he asks M. de Souvré one day. "At Your Majesty's feet," replies the courtier, who is noted for his frankness. Louis XV. remains pensive, because he has just been reminded that kings are not immortal. How well these profound words of Pascal apply to Louis XV.: "It does not require a very lofty soul to understand that there is no true and solid satisfaction here below, that all our pleasures are but vanities, that our woes are infinite, and that in fine death, which threatens us every instant, must put us in a few years, and perchance in a few days, in an eternal state of happiness, or misery, or annihilation. Between us and heaven, hell or nothingness, there is, then, nothing but life, which is the most fragile of all things in the world; and heaven being certainly not for those who doubt whether their soul is immortal, they have nothing to expect but hell or nothingness. Nothing is more real than this, nor more terrible. Do all that the brave demand of us, and yet there is the end which awaits the most beautiful of lives." Here is the secret of the King's implacable sadness. Like all men who have but

half a religion, he finds in it not consolations, but terrors. The feasts of the Church are not joys but tortures to him.

His monarchical faith is like his religious faith; it disturbs rather than reassures him. He feels himself unworthy to be the anointed of the Lord. His conscience as a king troubles him as much as his conscience as a Christian. He esteems neither himself nor those who surround him. He willingly agrees with his minister of foreign affairs, the Marquis d'Argenson, a monarchist who talks like a republican, that "Numerous and magnificent courts, the bait of fools and the wicked, will never make the splendor of royalty. There will always be display enough in decency. . . . Be persuaded that the greatest vice of monarchical governments is what is called the court. To begin with the monarch, it is from him that all vices are drawn, and from him that they spread as from the box of Pandora." But do not exaggerate, do not force the note. Recollect especially that republican courts — and there are such, for democrats in power also have their courtiers — are neither more rigid nor more moral than those of kings and emperors.

It must always be remembered that a real difference exists between the royalty of Louis XIV. and that of Louis XV. Louis XIV. performed his kingly duties with the facility of a great actor playing his part, or, better, with the dignity of an officiating priest. Louis XV., on the contrary, in spite of his noble

bearing and the successful beginnings of his reign, is almost ashamed of his royal dignity. He does not like what is grand; what he prefers are small apartments, little suppers, petty conversations. At times the monarch is not even a private gentleman; he is a bourgeois who makes up his own kitchen accounts, who saves candle-ends, who haggles with his domestics, who leads a mean and grovelling existence. It is not he who would have chosen the haughty device of the Sun King: *Nec pluribus impar.* The beams of the royal star dazzle his eyes. What pleases him is not the splendid glittering Gallery of Mirrors, but smart residences, little dwellings hid in verdure; Choisy for example, where, as the Duke de Luynes puts it, he is almost like a private person who takes pleasure in doing the honors of his château.

But neither let us forget that from time to time Louis XV. has inklings of greatness, dreams of glory and power. He is not the sluggard king that badly informed historians portray. Military instincts revive in him. The pride of his race awaked. "The King amidst his troops, becomingly uniformed in white or blue or jonquil, his hat placed coquettishly above his ear, the white cord, the shoulder-knot on his coat, himself starts the gay speeches, the tales of gallantry. The nobleman goes to battle in ruffles and powdered hair, with perfume on his Brussels lace handkerchief; elegance has never done harm to courage, and politeness is nobly allied to bravery."[1]

[1] M. Capefigue, *Madame la Marquise de Pompadour.* 1 vol. Amyot.

1745 is a triumphant year, the year of Fontenoy, one of our greatest national victories. There Louis XV. and the Dauphin behave like sons of Henri IV. Voltaire's enthusiasm when he celebrates this great day is not made to order, and the advocate Barbier is sincere in exclaiming that the reign of Louis XV. is the finest in all French history.

Nor let us believe that this monarch, over-lauded by his contemporaries but too much decried by history, is as indolent as people like to say. On the contrary, he works, and works a great deal. He not merely presides with the greatest regularity at the ministerial council, but he busies himself in a very special way with military and diplomatic affairs. If he readily agrees with what is proposed by his ministers without troubling himself to contradict them, it is because apart from official politics he has a secret policy whose springs he personally controls.[1] His intentions are good, he loves France sincerely. What then will ruin him? Two defects which are nearly always inseparable: sensuality and indecision.

Sensuality enfeebles, enervates; the man who is its victim can no longer either act or will. In the end he arrives at that commonplace benevolence, that insignificant good nature, that absence of character and energy, those inconsistencies and hesitations which rob sovereigns as well as private individuals of the very notion of just ideas and the courage of

[1] M. Boutaric, *Correspondance Secrète de Louis XV.*

salutary resolutions. Louis XV. comes from the arms of his mistresses without force enough left to be a king.

Distrust and timidity form the basis of his character. "He knows he is badly served," says M. Boutaric; "absolute master, he has only to speak to be obeyed, and, fortified by conscience, he can command, but he is so timid, let us say the word, so pusillanimous, that after having carefully sought the best way and seen it clearly, he nearly always decides, although with regret, for the worst which is proposed to him by his ministers or his mistresses. It is of public notoriety that when the King proposes anything in council, his opinion is always combated, and that, after making a number of objections, the prince always ends by adopting that of his counsellors, knowing, meantime, that he is doing wrong, and muttering to himself, 'So much the worse; they would have it.'" Thus he illustrates those lines of Horace: —

"Video meliora proboque,
Deteriora sequor."

There are moments when, to use the expression of Duclos, he affects to regard himself as a disgraced prince of the blood without any credit at court. One day when the Queen is complaining of the opposition made to one of her recommendations by a minister, he says: "Why don't you do as I do? I never ask anything of those people." In spite of his omnipotence he feels himself always under the necessity of

employing subterfuges and underhand expedients. According to a man who knew him well and saw him every day, Le Roy, master of the hounds, he considered dissimulation the most needful quality for a sovereign. "His hobby," says the Marquis d'Argenson, "is to be impenetrable." Another of his defects is to consider that very honest men are generally not very able. Hence the great number of disreputable men whom he intrusts with most important positions. With such a system he is doomed to perpetual fluctuations, to that variability which is the sign of weakness. He will hesitate between peace and war, between a Prussian and an Austrian alliance, between the Parliamentarians and their enemies, between the Jesuits and the Jansenists. He has a horror of the philosophers, and he will make Voltaire a gentleman of the chamber and lodge Quesnay in an entresol of the palace of Versailles. He sincerely believes in the truth of the Catholic religion, and he will take as his mistress, counsellor, and directress the friend of the Encyclopedists. By conviction and principle he is essentially conservative, and he will be the precursor of the Revolution.

"Oh! how well the word feebleness," exclaims D'Argenson, "expresses the passions of certain men endowed with good nature and facility. They see and approve the best and they follow the worst. Their virility is but a prolongation of childhood. Frequently they mistake the shadow of pleasure for pleasure itself. Youthfulness, childishness, self-love

without pride, their acts of firmness are but obstinacy and revolt. . . . With this sad character a prince thinks he governs well when he simply does not govern at all. Every one deceives him, and he is the chief of his own betrayers. He has mistresses for whom he has no predilection, and absolute ministers in whom he does not confide. All the defects of which foreigners accuse Frenchmen are found in him; contrasts everywhere, the effects of a too frivolous imagination which overmasters judgment; wasted talents, good taste which nothing can satisfy, exactness in little things, inconstancy and lack of enthusiasm in great ones . . . ; memory without remembrance; patience and calm, promptitude and kindness, mystery and indiscretion, avidity for new pleasures, disgust and ennui, momentary sensibility succeeded by general and complete apathy . . . total, a good master without humanity."

Having thus drawn the portrait of Louis XV., D'Argenson says in speaking of the Queen: "She attracts by certain attentions, she repels by making her friendship too common. Her rank is a rallying signal and, since the King has declared mistresses, those who inveigh against scandal attach themselves to her for the sake of displeasing the King and the favorite. Their murmurs are proportioned to the royal patience."

In 1745 Marie Leczinska, who is the King's senior by seven years, has arrived at the age of forty-two. When her tenth child was born, July 15, 1737,

Madame Louise, who was one day to become a Carmelite, some one asked the King, who already had six living children, if the little princess should be called Madame Seventh. He answered: "Madame Last." Thenceforward the Queen was neglected. Her husband has treated her with frigid politeness, but has always kept her at a distance; he never speaks to her except before witnesses. On New Year's day he gives her no presents. Not the least intimacy, the slightest unconstraint. The short daily visits he pays her are matters of decorum, formalities of etiquette. The Queen eats by herself. Between her apartments and those of the King there is a barrier which she never crosses. The familiar life and the cabinet suppers are not for her. Separated from each other by the Peace Salon, the Gallery of Mirrors, and the Council Chamber, each of the spouses has a life apart.

Marie Leczinska is the only person who maintains at Versailles the ceremonious representation of the court of the great King, not through pride, but out of respect for principles. By eleven o'clock in the morning she has already heard one Mass, seen the King for an instant, received her children and the little entries; at noon the state toilette and the great entries. At one o'clock Marie Leczinska hears a second Mass. At two o'clock she dines in public,[1]

[1] The dinner took place in the room called the Queen's Antechamber, No. 117 of the *Notice du Musée*, by M. Eudore Soulié.

served by her maid of honor and four ladies in full dress. A low balustrade separates her from a crowd, always curious to be present at this repast and to contemplate the features of a justly honored queen. Toward six in the evening she plays the game of loto then in fashion, the *Cavagnole*. When the King is present, she never sits down until he bids her do so, and 'tis a wonder if the pair exchange a few syllables. At ten the Queen withdraws, and after supper she sees a very restricted circle: the Duke and Duchess de Luynes, Mesdames de Villars and de Chevreuse, Minister Maurepas, Cardinals de Tencin and de Luynes, President Hénault, Moncrif, and sometimes old Fontenelle. On Sundays the presentation of ladies takes place. It is also the day chosen for the taking of tabourets. The ceremonies occur in the room called the Queen's Salon,[1] contiguous to the sleeping-chamber. The sovereign's chair is placed at the back of the room on a platform covered by a canopy.[2] "By a few words, a nod, a glance, a smile, Marie Leczinska knows how to encourage the lady presented, whose embarrassment soon yields to a gentle confidence as the Queen addresses to her one of those remarks which remain engraven in the heart."[3]

[1] Room No. 116 of the *Notice du Musée*.

[2] The gilted screw-rings which served to support this canopy may still be seen in the cornice opposite the windows.

[3] *La reine Marie Leczinska*, by Madame the Countess d'Armaillé, born de Ségur. 1 vol., Didier.

To sum up, neglected as she is by her husband, the Queen is happier than he, because she has the great boon, the supreme good, which he has not: peace of heart. "What comparison is there," says a great preacher, "between the frightful remorse of conscience, that hidden worm which gnaws incessantly, that sadness of crime which undermines and depresses, that weight of iniquity which crushes, that interior sword which pierces and which we cannot draw out, and the amiable sadness of penitence which works salvation?"[1] This expression "amiable sadness" is most applicable to the Queen. Doubtless she suffers profoundly at seeing Louis XV. throw himself down the declivity of scandal. But, far from recriminating, she offers her sufferings to God. Gentle and pious victim, she finds ineffable consolations at the foot of the altar. Instead of avenging herself on the King by reproaches and bitter speeches, she prays for him. Her calmness, resignation, charity, her Christian virtues, and exquisite affability, make her the object of universal veneration. She is called nothing but the Good Queen.

The Dauphin[2] is not less esteemed than his mother. In 1745 he is sixteen years old. He is a pious, well-taught, well-intentioned young man. He has

[1] Massillon, *Sermon sur les dégoûts qui accompagnent la piété.*

[2] Born at Versailles, September 4, 1729, died at Fontainebleau, December 20, 1765. He married a Spanish Infanta in 1745, and in 1747 a princess of Saxony, the mother of Louis XVI., Louis XVIII., and of Charles X.

made serious studies. His favorite reading is Plato, Cicero, Tacitus, Lucretius, Horace, Virgil, Juvenal. He knows by heart the finest passages of the philosophers and poets of antiquity. For him were made those magnificent editions of the Louvre, *Ad usum Delphini*, one of the most precious monuments of contemporary typography.

Full of respect for his father, he never speaks to him but in the tone of profound submission. He effaces himself, he holds himself in restraint. He says: "A Dauphin should employ one half his mind in concealing the other half." Louis XV. is suspicious; it is well not to offend him.

The Dauphin marries at Versailles, February 23, 1745, an Infanta of Spain, daughter of Philip V., Marie Thérèse Antoinette Raphaelle, younger sister of that Infanta Marie Anne Victoire whom Louis XV. was to have married. The affront of sending back that princess is thus repaired. The marriage festivities are splendid; no such pomp had ever been seen. "As the King has need of money," writes Barbier, "especially for the very considerable expenses of the Dauphin's marriage, a great many tontines are raised." The day that the Dauphiness arrived at Étampes, the King, who went to meet her, said: "Here is a good day's work done." She replied: "Sire, this is not what I dreaded most; I flattered myself you would receive me kindly. I am more afraid of to-morrow and the next day; everybody will be looking at me, and I shall perhaps find

less favorable dispositions." The new Dauphiness is not pretty, but she is sympathetic. Her amiability wins everybody. She says to Madame de Brancas that she does not understand how one can become angry, and that if any possible case arose to make it necessary, she would beg some one the day before to do so in her stead.

This marriage diverts the King, who no longer thinks of the poor Duchess de Châteauroux, who has been dead two months. Pleasures tread on each other's heels. The court is dazzling. How superb are these Versailles festivities, the last term of elegance and luxury! What a magnificent masked ball[1] in the radiant Gallery of Mirrors, glittering sanctuary of ecstasy and apotheosis, modern Olympus which seems made for goddesses and gods! Imagine that aristocratic crowd which swarms up the Ambassadors' Staircase, streams through the grand apartments of the King, the halls of Venus, Diana, Mars, Mercury, and Apollo, the War Salon, to be present at the fairy-like ball given in the gallery under the vaulted ceilings decorated by Lebrun's magic brush! Fancy the animation, the tumult of good company, the harmonious orchestras, the witty or gallant conversations, the bright eyes glowing behind their masks, the colossal mirrors reflecting the richest and most varied costumes: fabulous divinities, great lords and châtelaines of the Middle Ages, Watteau's

[1] February 25, 1745.

shepherds and shepherdesses; chandeliers innumerable, pyramids of candles, baskets of flowers, a rain of diamonds and precious stones, and, to heighten still more the bewildering charm, the mysterious presence of that monarch, the handsomest man in all the kingdom, who hides his royalty under the folds of his domino!

In our civilian and democratic century we find it very difficult to get a perfect notion of such festivities. "We children of a wretched and bloody revolution," as M. Capefigue says, "see these galleries of glass and gilding inundated with people in rough clothing, with noisy, hobnailed shoes, like a muddy torrent spreading over a parterre of tulips and variegated roses." Let us not forget that there was chivalry and courage, carelessness and gaiety, animation and native wit, charm and elegance, in the last fortunate days of the French nobility. If the men who shone at that period should return, they would find ours mean and irksome.

The noise of battle succeeds the echoes of the orchestras. Two months and a half after this fine ball Louis XV. and his son are with the army. The King wishes that the Dauphin, although but sixteen years old, should set an example, and at Fontenoy the young man excites the admiration of old soldiers by his ardor and courage.

Louis XV. is a happy father. His son is a model of filial respect. His six daughters, Mesdames Elisabeth, Henriette, Adelaide, Victoire, Sophie, and

Louise, all of whom with the exception of Madame Adelaide were educated in the convent of Fontevrault, have the most religious sentiments and display profound affection for their father. Only one of them is married, the eldest, Madame Elisabeth, who espoused in 1739 the Infant Don Philip, son of the King of Spain, and with whom Louis XV. did not part without keen sorrow. In 1745 only two of his daughters, Henriette and Adelaide, are with him. The other three, Victoire, Sophie, and Louise, are still at Fontevrault, and it is singular that this king, so affectionate to his children, should leave them in a convent eighty leagues from Versailles when it would be so easy to place them, if not close beside him, at least in some neighboring convent.

In order to complete this sketch of the royal family in 1745, it remains to say a few words about the Duke d'Orléans and his son, the Duke de Chartres.

Born in 1703, and widowed since 1726 of a princess of Baden, the Duke d'Orléans, only son of the regent, seldom shows himself at court. The premature death of his wife, whom he had the misfortune of losing after two years of marriage, had inspired him with extremely grave and Christian reflections. His tastes have become those of an anchorite. In 1730 he resigned his position as Colonel-general in order to be more at liberty to make very frequent retreats at the Abbey of Sainte Geneviève. In 1742 he finally renounced all political action, and quitted the Council of State in order to install himself definitively

in his dear abbey, where he leads the life of a monk, between prayer and study. He has left the administration of his property to his mother, keeping for himself only an income of one million eight hundred thousand livres, which he spends almost entirely in works of charity.

'Tis a curious type this prince, so little like his father; this Christian, pious to asceticism, who sleeps on straw, drinks only water, does without fire in winter, who composes but will not print austere works, a translation of the Psalms with commentaries, part of the Old Testament and some of the Epistles of Saint Paul, a treatise against the theatre, historical and theological dissertations, — a monastic prince whom the court has inclined to the cloister, who at his death (February 4, 1752) will bequeath his library to the Dominicans, his medals to the Abbey of Sainte Geneviève, and whose funeral oration will be composed by Jean Jacques Rousseau.

His son, the Duke de Chartres, is twenty years old in 1745. A brilliant and brave young prince, who has distinguished himself as colonel at the battle of Dettingen, and as lieutenant-general at the siege of Fribourg. Married in 1743 to Louise Henriette de Bourbon-Conti, he loves the world as much as his father dislikes it, and he will be one of the principal actors in the theatre of the little apartments.

So long as the Dauphin has no male children, it is the Orléans branch which, according to the renunciations of the treaty of Utrecht, must ascend the

throne of France in case of the death of Louis XV. and his son. But on both sides of the Pyrenees the practical value of these renunciations is contested. When Louis XV. fell seriously ill before his marriage, in 1721, Philip V. made ready to reclaim the crown of France if the young King should die. When the Dauphin, who as yet has no heir, will himself be in danger of death, Madame du Hausset will write in her Memoirs: "The King would be in despair at having a prince of the blood as his recognized successor. He does not like them, and looks at them so distantly as to humiliate them. When his son recovered, he said: 'The King of Spain would have had a good chance.' It is claimed that he was right in this, and that it would have been justice; but that if the Duke d'Orléans had had a party, he might have claimed the throne."

We have just outlined the portraits of the members of the royal family in 1745. We are about to study the character of the woman who, issuing from the middle classes, was to exercise a real domination over the King and all his court during twenty years.

II

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE MARQUISE DE POMPADOUR

THERE are names which are the abridgment of an entire society. Such is that gay name which rhymes so well with "amour," which seems made expressly for a *grande dame* after the manner of Lancret or Watteau, which would fit so well a comic opera or a pastoral, which is worthy to figure in the Temple of Cnidos and to be celebrated by the pretty little verses of the Abbé de Bernis, which evokes so many souvenirs of immoral elegance and factitious sentimentality of boudoirs and alcoves, comedies and gewgaws, pleasures and intrigues: the Marquise de Pompadour. Woman, name, title, all are alike gracious, pretty, sprightly; but nothing is simple, nothing true. The character is that of a comedienne perpetually on the stage. The beauty owes a great part of its prestige to the refinements of luxury and the artifices of the toilette. The marquisate is a contraband one.

The future favorite seems predestined almost from the cradle to her part. She is a little marvel, an infant prodigy. She is only nine years old when a

fortune-teller by cards predicts to her that she will be the mistress of Louis XV. This prediction delights her family; they believe in it as if it were written in the Gospels, and they decide to do all in their power to realize it. Aid yourself, and hell will aid you. She who was one day to call herself Madame the Marquise de Pompadour was then named Jeanne Antoinette Poisson. Born in Paris, December 29, 1721, she had a father who was vulgar even to indecency, François Poisson, former clerk of the Paris brothers, who was condemned to be hanged in 1726 for malversations, but rehabilitated in 1741 after several years of exile. Her mother was a Demoiselle de la Motte, daughter of the provision contractor of the Hôtel des Invalides, a very pretty woman, guilty of many infidelities to her husband, and very richly subsidized by a gallant farmer-general, M. Lenormand de Tournehem. The financier imagines, possibly with good reason, that he is the father of little Antoinette. Hence he gives her the most careful education. She is taught everything except virtue. Jéliotte teaches her singing and the harpsichord, Guibaudet dancing, Crébillon declamation. She is an actress, a musician, an accomplished singer. She imitates la Gaussin and la Clairon marvellously. She rides admirably. She dresses ravishingly. She is as pretty as Cupid. Nobody tells a story so well as she. She is pleasing, amusing, delightful. Her mother, enthusiastic over such charms, exclaims: "She is a morsel for a king!"

But how to justify the prediction of the sorceress? The place of king's mistress is occupied by none but very great ladies: a Countess de Mailly, a Countess de Vintimille, a Duchess de Châteauroux. Can little Poisson aspire to the same rôle? If she persists in such schemes, will not people say that the keg always smells of the herring? Will the Duke de Richelieu permit a *bourgeoise* to supplant the nobility in this fashion? Mademoiselle Poisson does not allow herself to be discouraged. She has her fixed idea. She believes in what she calls her star. Her marriage is the first rung of the ambitious ladder. March 9, 1741, she marries a rich young man, M. Lenormand d'Étioles, deputy farmer-general, nephew of M. Lenormand de Tournehem, Madame Poisson's lover. The bride is nineteen, the husband twenty-four years old; he is madly in love, and as his wife tells him she will never betray him unless for the King, he mutters: "Then I can be very easy."

The young wife is presently the fashion. She is the gem of that financial society which has made such headway since the latter years of Louis XIV. President Hénault writes to Madame du Deffand, July, 1742: "At Madame de Montigny's I met one of the prettiest women I have ever seen, Madame d'Étioles. She understands music perfectly, sings with all possible gaiety and taste, knows a hundred ballads, and plays comedy at Étioles on a stage as fine as that of the Opera, with machinery and changes of scenes."

She prepares her success skilfully. The trumpets

of fame are at her disposal. Voltaire, Montesquieu, Fontenelle, the Abbé de Bernis, are her friends. At Paris, in her house in rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs, and at Étioles in her château near Corbeil, she leads a life of luxury and pleasures. She is an enchantress, a siren. But she has only one desire,—to make the King the objective point of all this magic. She would scorn any other conquest.

The man she must have is Louis XV. To arrive at this conquest she will exhaust the resources of feminine coquetry. Never were manœuvres more persevering, artifices more sagacious. She has to play the enamoured woman, the passionate woman, to pursue the King when he hunts in the forest of Sénart, to pass and repass, like a graceful apparition, like the goddess of the forests, through the midst of the escort with their dogs and horses, sometimes robed in azure in a rose-colored phaeton, sometimes in rose in a phaeton of blue. One day she is on horseback; another day she drives herself, in an elegant conch shell of rock crystal, two chestnut horses swift as lightning. The King inquires the name of this elegant and pretty woman. Then he sends her some of his game. Madame d'Étioles has good hopes. The Duchess de Châteauroux is dead; she is sure of replacing her.

The masked balls given at the time of the Dauphin's marriage are excellent opportunities to display one's self. At the Hôtel de Ville ball the prettiest women of the bourgeoisie are grouped together on a

her. The monarch is affected and installs her mysteriously in the chamber formerly occupied by Madame de Mailly. Poor M. d'Étioles, on his return to Paris, learns what has befallen him. He faints away at the fatal tidings, and afterwards writes his wife a letter so touching that Louis XV., after reading it, cannot avoid saying: "Madame, you have a very honest husband." In despair at first, the betrayed husband at last resigns himself. He does not try to contend with a king, and repairs philosophically to the south of France, to make an inspection into finances which is part of his official duties as deputy farmer-general.

At court there is great commotion. It seems impossible to imagine that a woman of the middle classes, *une robine*, as D'Argenson says, can replace a great lady like the Duchess de Châteauroux. The Duke de Luynes writes in his Memoirs, March 11, 1745: "All the masked balls have given occasion for talk concerning the King's new amours, and principally of a Madame d'Étioles, who is young and pretty. It is said that for some time she is nearly always here, and that she is the King's choice. If such is the fact, it can hardly be anything more than a case of gallantry, and not of mistress."

Louis XV., who is fond of mystery, amuses himself at first by being discreet. He conceals his new favorite. "It is not known where she is lodged," writes the Duke de Luynes, April 23, 1745, "but, nevertheless, I think it is in a little apartment that

Madame de Mailly had, and which adjoins the little cabinets; she does not live here all the time, but comes and goes to Paris."

A few days later, May 5, 1745, the King sets off for the army with the Dauphin. But Madame d'Étioles has the good sense not to rejoin him there. Nor does she remain at Versailles, but withdraws to her château of Étioles, near Corbeil, where Voltaire and the Abbé de Bernis keep her company. Louis XV., much more occupied with his new mistress than with the war, writes her letter upon letter. The Abbé de Bernis counsels the favorite who, with such a secretary, cannot fail to reply to her royal lover in the most charming and gallantly turned epistles. We read in the Memoirs of the Duke de Luynes (June 19, 1745): "Madame d'Étioles is still in the country, near Paris, and has never wanted to go to Flanders. The King is more in love than ever; he writes and sends couriers to her at every moment."

All France uttered a cry of enthusiasm on learning the victory of Fontenoy (May 11, 1745). But could one believe it? The person first felicitated by Voltaire on account of that glorious day was neither Louis XV. nor Marshal de Saxe, but Madame d'Étioles. Before writing his poem on Fontenoy, the obsequious poet addressed the favorite in these stanzas: —

"Quand César, ce héros charmant,
Dont tout Rome fut idolâtre,
Gagnait quelque combat brillant,
On en faisait son compliment
À la divine Cléopâtre.

"Quant Louis, ce héros charmant,
Dont tout Paris fait son idole,
Gagne quelque combat brillant,
On doit en faire compliment
À la divine d'Étiole."[1]

France, always maddened by success, is in a real delirium. The Parliament of Paris sends a deputation to Lille to felicitate the King on his victory and entreat him "so far as may be, not to expose in future his sacred person, on which the welfare and safety of the State depend." All the supreme courts of the kingdom imitate that of Paris, and the first president of the court of taxes exclaims in his address to the King: "Your Majesty's conquests are so rapid that the point is how to safeguard the faith of our descendants and lessen the wonder of miracles, lest heroes should dispense themselves from following, and people from believing, in them." But the conquest which chiefly preoccupies Louis XV. is that of his new mistress.

In July, 1745, she proudly displays eighty amorous epistles from the gallant sovereign; the motto on the seal is: *Discreet and faithful;* one of them is

[1] When Cæsar, that charming hero,
Whom all Rome idolized,
Gained some brilliant combat,
People complimented on it
The divine Cleopatra.

When Louis, that charming hero,
Who is the idol of all Paris,
Gains some brilliant combat,
One must compliment on it
The divine D'Étioles.

addressed: *À la Marquise de Pompadour*, and contains the brevet conferring this title. The new marquise instantly discards the name of Étioles, leaves off her husband's arms, substitutes three towers in their place, and puts her servants in grand livery. This marquisate enchants Voltaire; he has become the official poet, courtier, and familiar of the favorite, and his complaisant muse thus celebrates the official accession of the new royal mistress: —

"Il sait aimer, il sait combattre;
Il envoie en ce beau séjour
Un brevet digne d'Henri quatre,
Signé: Louis, Mars et l'Amour.
Mais les ennemis ont leur tour,
Et sa valeur et sa prudence
Donnent à Gand, le même jour,
Un brevet de ville de France.
Ces deux brevets, si bien venus,
Vivront tous deux dans la mémoire.
Chez lui, les autels de Vénus
Sont dans le temple de la Gloire."[1]

The democrats, perhaps, are in a trifle too much of a hurry to erect a statue to Voltaire.

[1] He knows how to love and how to fight;
He sends to this fair abode
A brevet worthy of Henry Fourth,
Signed: Louis, Mars, and Love.
But the enemies have their turn,
And his valor and his prudence
Give to Ghent, the same day,
A brevet as a French city.
These two brevets, so welcome,
Will both survive in memory.
With him the altars of Venus
Are in the temple of Glory.

III

THE NEW MARQUISE

LOUIS XV. had had enough of glory. Impatient to meet again the new marquise, he left the army September 1, 1745, and returned to Versailles, where his mistress awaited him in the apartment once occupied by the Duchess de Châteauroux. This change of reign was effected in an official manner. There was no more attempt at mystery. The Marquise de Pompadour was *presented* September 15, conformably to the rules of etiquette. Every tongue at court was wagging over this scandalous and ridiculous ceremony. Every one wondered how the Queen would look. The King, his wife, and his mistress thus exposed themselves to public view, and the ancient ceremonial became merely a parody. The Princess de Conti, whose debts and prodigalities seemed to condemn her to such complaisant rôles, was the lady who presented her. The Marquise appeared at first before the King, whose countenance betrayed an easily comprehended embarrassment. Then she entered the salon of the Queen and could not hide her confusion.

But Marie Leczinska, good and indulgent even to exaggeration, reassured her by a gracious reception. Naming one of the few aristocratic women with whom Madame de Pompadour was connected, she said: "Have you any news of Madame de Saissac? I have been much pleased to see her sometimes in Paris." The Marquise, touched and grateful, know not what to answer. She reddened and stammered out: "Madame, I have the greatest passion to please you."

The Abbé de Bernis celebrated thus the new queen of Cythera: —

"Tout va changer: les crimes d'un volage
Ne seront plus érigés en exploits.
La Pudeur seul obtiendra notre hommage,
L'amour constant rentrera dans ses droits.
L'exemple en est donné par le plus grand des rois,
Et par la beauté la plus sage."[1]

The choice of Louis XV. was thenceforward settled. The gallant monarch was about to plume himself on fidelity.

What do you think of this modesty and this discretion? As Sainte-Beuve says, these poets have a way of taking things which belongs to them alone.

[1] All is about to change: the crimes of an inconstant
No longer will be vaunted as exploits.
Modesty alone will obtain our homage,
Constant Love will resume his rights.
The example of it is given by the greatest of kings
And the most discreet of beauties.

There was plenty of adulation, but there was also plenty of fault-finding. The great ladies could not get used to seeing a *bourgeoise* occupy the post of King's mistress. They observed with malevolent and ever alert attention this improvised marquise who tried to give herself airs of nobility and grandeur. They recalled the fact that her grandfather had been provision-contractor for the Hôtel des Invalides. She is the granddaughter of a butcher, said they; they jeered pitilessly about meat and fish; they found her awkward in her part, like a grisette disguised as a marchioness. Exasperated at seeing at Versailles a royal mistress not of his choosing, the Duke de Richelieu tried, says Duclos, "to make the King consider her on the footing of a *bourgeoise* out of place, a passing gallantry, a simple amusement not adapted to remain worthily at court." If anything in her manners or her language was not perfectly well-bred, the favorite became the butt of sarcasm as soon as her back was turned. Louis XV. used to say: "It will amuse me to educate her."

Madame de Pompadour had at all events the good sense to maintain a humble and submissive attitude when she appeared before the Queen. The rank and virtues of Marie Leczinska intimidated her. Here is a curious passage which occurs in the Memoirs of the Duke de Luynes: "Day before yesterday, as she was returning from Mass, Madame de Pompadour said to Madame de Luynes that she was in the keenest anxiety and most bitter sorrow; that she knew some-

body had frightfully aspersed her to the Queen; and, without explaining to what she referred, said she hoped greatly that the Queen would not believe it, and that she begged her to speak about it to her. Madame de Luynes instantly gave an account of this to the Queen." Here is the letter written to Madame de Pompadour by the Duchess de Luynes: "I have just been speaking to the Queen, Madame, and I earnestly entreated her to tell me frankly if she had anything against you; she answered in the kindliest way that she had not, and that she was even very sensible of your efforts to please her on all occasions; she even desired me to write and tell you so."

This is the reply of the Marquise: "You bring me to life again, Madame; for three days I have been in unheard-of pain, as you will believe without difficulty, knowing as you do my attachment to the Queen. They have made frightful accusations against me to Monsieur and to Madame the Dauphiness, who have been kind enough to allow me to prove the falsity of the horrors they accuse me of. I had been told some days ago that the Queen had been prejudiced against me; think of my despair, who would give my life for her, who find her goodness to me every day more precious. It is certain that the kinder she is to me, the more will the jealousy of the monsters of this place be employed in abusing me, unless she is so good as to be on her guard against them and will kindly let me know of what I am accused. It will not be difficult for me to justify

myself; the tranquillity of my soul on this subject assures me as much. I hope, Madame, that your friendship for me, and still more your knowledge of my character, will be the guarantees of what I am writing you. Doubtless you must be annoyed by such a long story; but my heart is so full that I cannot conceal it from you. You know my sentiments toward you, Madame; they will end only with my life" (February, 1746).

We read again in the Memoirs of the Duke de Luynes (March, 1746): "Madame de Pompadour, who knows the Queen loves flowers, is so attentive as to send her bouquets as often as possible; she continues to seek every occasion to please her."

The Queen may have reflected that, after all, since a mistress was inevitable, this one was better than another. Since he had been directed by Madame de Pompadour, the King seemed in a less sombre temper and looked a little less bored. But he lost in the favorite's society the needful energy to continue the successes of the French arms, and sign a really glorious peace.

While Louis XV. was thus wasting away in futilities, Marshal Saxe conquered all Belgium. Louis XV. never made his appearance at the army from May 4 to the middle of June, 1746. After having made a triumphal entry at Antwerp he hastened back to Versailles, apparently to be present when the Dauphiness was delivered, in reality to see Madame de Pompadour again. The Dauphiness died prema-

turely in July. D'Argenson says she had become as good a Frenchwoman as if she had been born at Versailles. She was regretted, but the hurly-burly of festivities soon began again, and Louis XV., after a very short mourning, resumed his accustomed diversions and pretended pleasures.

The successes of his troops were as brilliant as they were rapid. Never had France held better cards. It was a magnificent occasion to complete national unity in the North. But though they had known how to conquer they knew not how to profit by the victory. The King did not comprehend his mission. He was thinking more about Madame de Pompadour than about the war, and while his soldiers were fighting so bravely, he, wholly given up to frivolous trifles, was amusing himself, or, better, he was trying to do so. This nonchalance became fatal. All the fruits of the war were lost by the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (October 18, 1748).

People had believed that Louis XV., who was master of all Belgium, of two Dutch provinces, of Savoy, and the county of Nice, would claim to retain at least a part of his conquests. But, to the general surprise, he declared he would not treat as a merchant, but as a king. This more than amazing phrase signified that France would demand nothing, nothing for so many dearly bought victories, nothing for the five hundred thousand men she had sacrificed, nothing for the twelve hundred millions added to the national debt. Louis XV. restored all the con-

quered cities and territories. He engaged not to rebuild the fortresses of Dunkirk; he recognized the English succession in the Protestant line and carried complaisance toward the vanquished of Fontenoy to the point of expelling the Pretender, the heroic Charles Edward, from France. Add to this that the French navy, like that of Spain, was half ruined, and that the time was not far distant when the sailor might salute the ocean as Britannic. It is true that the Infant Philip, married to the eldest daughter of Louis XV., obtained the duchies of Parma and Plaisance. But this was but a petty advantage considered as a recompense for so many sacrifices of men and money.

As might have been expected, the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle was profoundly unpopular. "As stupid as the peace," people said in Paris. The odium of it was cast upon the woman who, to play her part as queen of the left hand, had meddled with diplomacy, finances, and the army.

In 1746 Voltaire had written to Louis XV.: —

"Grand roi, Londres gémit, Vienne pleure et t'admire.
Ton bras va décider du destin de l'Empire.
La Sardaigne balance et Munich se répent,
Le Batave, indécis, au remords est en proie;
Et la France s'écrie au milieu de sa joie:
'Le plus aimé des rois est aussi le plus grand!'"[1]

[1] Great King, London groans, Vienna weeps and admires thee.
Thine arm is about to decide the fate of the Empire.
Sardinia wavers, and Munich repents;
Batavia, undecided, is a prey to remorse;
And France exclaims amidst her joy:
"The best loved of Kings is also the greatest!"

Everything was greatly changed in 1748; London no longer groaned, and Vienna did not admire. There was neither repentance at Munich nor remorse at Batavia, and very little was said about the greatness of the best beloved of Kings. The situation already contained in germ the disasters of the future Seven Years' War. France, which loves success, no longer compared Madame de Pompadour to *la belle Gabrielle*. But the favorite had one grand consolation under the rain of sarcasms and satires; her theatre of the little Cabinets of Versailles was succeeding very well; and if she was hissed as a political woman, she was warmly applauded as an actress.

IV

MADAME DE POMPADOUR'S THEATRE

"I HAVE seen all that is done under the sun, and beheld that all is vanity and vexation of spirit. I have said within myself: Let us take all manner of delights and let us enjoy our possessions; and I have recognized that this too is vanity. I have condemned the laughter of folly and I have cried unto joy: Why dost thou deceive us vainly?"

What the Preacher thought, Louis XV. thought also. Like Solomon, he was bored. His ennui was the terror of Madame de Pompadour. The problem she had to solve was how to entertain a man who could no longer be amused. The favorite trembled. Here was her favor barely begun, and already she beheld symptoms of indifference and lassitude in her royal lover. D'Argenson writes in 1747: "The Pompadour is about to be dismissed. The King will live with his family." The Marquise was afraid lest the sovereign, who really had a badly understood but sincere religion at bottom, might some day conclude to be truly devout. Hence she desired at any cost to divert him from serious ideas and plunge

him, in his own despite, into the vortex of false pleasures whose emptiness and poverty he knew so well.

Even amid the splendors of Versailles, the new Marquise regretted her successes as a private actress. The echo of the applause she had become accustomed to in the parlor theatres of M. Lenormand de Tournehem, at Étioles, and of Madame de Villemur, at Chantemerle, still resounded in her flattered ears. Those who are habituated to the emotions and vanities of the stage cannot easily do without them. Madame de Pompadour was homesick for the footlights and the boards. To play in comedy is such a fine occasion for a pretty woman to shine! To see all eyes fixed on her; to put beauty and her toilettes in the best lights; to be greeted when she appears by a murmur of admiration; to receive when the play is ended the rain of flowers and garlands that tumble at her feet; and at last, when the actress resumes the *grande dame* and re-enters the drawing-room, to glean compliments, madrigals, and enthusiastic plaudits afresh, — what a triumph for a fashionable woman, what exquisite joy for a coquette!

Women of the highest social rank are often jealous of actresses. It annoys them to perceive that they have not that order of charms which comediennes possess. They envy them the privilege of attracting the attention of a whole theatre, of being the object of all regards, the subject of all eulogies, and the ability to say to a lover after a triumph: "I have

played only for you, I have thought of you alone; these flowers that have been thrown to me I give to you." They envy them the excitement of those noisy ovations, in comparison with which all the flatteries of society seem tame. They envy them above all that faculty of metamorphosis which transforms the same woman into a shepherdess or a queen, a nymph or a goddess, so that a man while adoring a single beauty, but a beauty incessantly changed and transfigured, finds himself at once faithful and inconstant.

This is why Madame de Pompadour wanted to play comedy at Versailles. Little by little she accustomed Louis XV. to this idea. Holy Week was always a sad time for the monarch, who was tortured by remorse and ashamed of playing so badly his part as eldest son of the Church. The favorite conceived the notion of enlivening this dreaded week by interludes, half religious, half profane. Accompanied by actors and amateurs, she sang pieces of sacred music. This Lent *à la Pompadour*, this mixture of church and opera, this exchange of religious for chamber, not to say alcove, music, was very acceptable to such a character as Louis XV. and a devotion as inconsistent and spurious as his. The courtiers, of course, went into ecstasies over the charming voice of the Marquise. They reminded the King of the triumphs of the little theatres at Étioles and Chantemerle, and pitied him for not having seen comedy played by so remarkable an

actress. Sacred music had served its time; another sort was now in order.

Madame de Pompadour achieved her purpose. A theatre was constructed for her at Versailles, — a miniature theatre, an elegant little place, a perfect gem.[1] The spot chosen was the gallery contiguous to the former Cabinet of Medals, a dependence of the King's small apartments (room No. 137 of the *Notice du Musée de Versailles*, by M. Eudore Soulié). Nearly one-third of the orchestra was composed of amateurs belonging to the most illustrious families, the other two-thirds being professional artists. The chorus singers were selected among the King's musicians. The dancers were boys and girls from nine to thirteen years at most, who, on reaching the latter age, were to enter the ballet corps of the opera, the Théâtre Français, or the Comédie-Italienne (the little girls distinguished themselves later on in choregraphic shows and gallantry). Celebrated painters, Boucher at their head, supplied the decorations. The *mise en scène* and the costumes were of incomparable elegance. As to the actors and actresses, they bore such names as the Duke de Chartres, the Duke d'Ayen, the Duke de Duras, the Duke de Nivernais, the Duke de Coigny, the Marquis d'Entraigues, the Count de Maillebois, the Duchess de

[1] See the accurate and interesting little work by M. Adolphe Julien: *Histoire du Théâtre de Mme. de Pompadour, dit Théâtre des petits cabinets*, with an etching by Martial after Boucher.

Brancas, the Marquise Livry, the Countess d'Estrades, Madame de Marchais, and finally, the principal actress, the Armida of all these enchantments, the Marquise de Pompadour. The Duke de La Vallière was chosen as director of the troupe; as sub-director *l'historiogriffe* of cats, Moncrif, academician and reader to the Queen; as secretary and prompter, the Abbé de La Garde, librarian to the Marquise. Madame de Pompadour drew up the regulations for the players. As approved by the King, they contained ten articles: —

"1. In order to be admitted as an associate, it will be necessary to prove that this is not the first time that one has acted, so as not to make one's novitiate in the troupe.

"2. Every one shall choose his own line of characters.

"3. No one may choose a different line from that for which he has been accepted, without obtaining the consent of all the associates.

"4. One cannot, in case of absence, appoint his substitute (a right expressly reserved to the Society which will appoint by an absolute majority).

"5. On his return, the person replaced will resume his own line.

"6. No associate can refuse a part appropriate to his line under pretext that such a part is unsuitable to his manner of acting or too fatiguing.

"7. The actresses alone have the right to select the pieces to be represented by the troupe.

"8. They shall also have the right to fix the day of representation, the number of rehearsals, and the days and hours when they shall occur.

"9. Each actor is bound to be present at the precise hour appointed for the rehearsal under penalty of a fine which the actresses alone shall determine among themselves.

"10. To the actresses alone a half-hour's grace is accorded, after which the fine they will have incurred shall be decided by themselves only.

"A copy of these statutes will be given to each secretary, who shall be bound to fetch it to each rehearsal."

Madame de Pompadour was quite right in drawing up a severe code of regulations, for it is not an easy thing to establish discipline in a troupe composed of society people, where the intrigues of the courtier are added to the vanity of the actor. What petty jealousies, what mean vanities! What manœuvres to obtain this or that part, what solicitations and cabals to ensure merely a spectator's place in the cœnaculum!

Louis XV. occupied himself seriously with such trifles. The direction of this miniature theatre gave him no fewer cares than the government of France. He reserved to himself the right of selecting the spectators, and it was a signal favor to have been thus chosen. Notwithstanding their ardent desire to be among the privileged persons, neither Marshal de Noailles, the Duke de Gesores, nor the

Prince de Conti were admitted to the opening of the theatre. It took place January 17, 1747. *Tartuffe* was given. Madame de Pompadour played Dorine. The first theatrical season of the little cabinets lasted until March 17.

After having secured applause as an actress in *Tartuffe*, *Les Trois Cousines*, and *Le Préjugé à la Mode*, the Marquise triumphed as a cantatrice in *Erigone:* "Madame de Pompadour sang very well," says the Duke de Luynes; "her voice has not much volume, but a very agreeable sound; she knows music well and sings with much taste."

The second theatrical season lasted from December 20, 1747, to March 30, 1748. The first representation comprised a comedy, *Le Mariage fait et rompu*, and a pastoral, *Ismène*, the words by Moncrif. Voltaire's *Enfant prodigue* was given December 20, to the author's great joy. Madame de Pompadour had promised Gresset to produce *Le Merchant*. She kept her word. The play required two months of study. It was given February 6, 1748, Madame de Pompadour playing Lisette. The Duke de Nivernais was excellent as Valère, and the Duke de Chartres took the part of Géronte. The grateful Gresset thanked the Marquise thus: —

"On ne trace que sur le sable
La parole vague et peu stable
De tous les seigneurs de la cour;
Mais sur le bronze inaltérable

Les Muses ont tracé le nom de Pompadour
Et sa parole invariable."[1]

Pastorals, opera ballets, comedies, succeeded each other quickly. (The complete list may be found in the opuscule of M. Adolphe Julien.) The usual spectators were those of the actors and actresses who were not playing, Marshal Saxe, Marshal de Duras, all the ministers, President Hénault, the Abbé de Bernis. The King did not have a fauteuil. He sat in an ordinary chair and, according to the Duke de Luynes, he seemed to be amused.

The Marquise was charming in the ballet of *Almases*. She had a splendid costume: a low-cut corsage of pink taffeta trimmed with silver wire, a petticoat of the same, pinked out with silver, opening over a second petticoat of white taffeta pinked out and embroidered in rose color; the mantle draping the whole was of white taffeta glazed with silver and embroidered in flowers of their natural color.

The first dancer of the troupe was the Marquis de Courtenvaux; the second, Count de Langeron. Others were the Duke de Beuvron and Count de Melfort, to whom were adjoined a ballet corps composed of young boys and little girls. Mesdemoiselles

[1] One traces but on sand
The vague and unstable promises
Of all the nobles of the court;
But on imperishable bronze
The Muses have have traced the name of Pompadour
And her invariable promise.

Gaussin and Dumesnil, of the Comédie-Française, gave advice to the actresses.

Under the title of *Comédies et ballets des petites apartements*, a collection was published, bearing on its title-page a notice that it was "Printed by express command of His Majesty." Many were displeased by this, especially the courtiers who were not admitted to the much-envied entertainments. The Marquis d'Argenson, who for some time had ceased to be minister of foreign affairs, wrote March 1, 1748, in his Danubian peasant style: "They have just published a very ridiculous collection of the divertisements of the theatre of the cabinets or small apartments of His Majesty, — wretched and flattering lyrics; one finds in it dancing and singing actors, general officers and buffoons, great court ladies and theatre girls. In fact, the King spends his time nowadays in seeing the Marquise and the other personages trained by all these professional actors, who familiarize themselves with the monarch in an impious and sacrilegious fashion."

In October, 1748, France had lost, by the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, an opportunity to enlarge its dominions. Louis XV. consoled himself by enlarging, if not the realm, at least the theatre of the little cabinets. A new hall was constructed in the space containing the great staircase of the Ambassadors,[1] care being taken to injure neither the

[1] This staircase, which led to the large apartments of the King, was destroyed in 1750. The present staircase in the wing of the palace was constructed on the side of it.

marble nor the pictures. The new theatre was movable. Fourteen hours were necessary to strip it, and twenty-four to set it up again. It was opened November 27, 1748, by the *Surprises de l'amour*, a play due to the collaboration of Gentil-Beniard, Moncrif, and De Rameau. The hall was a masterpiece of elegance. But Louis XV. was not amused. He yawned. The grand opera of *Tancred* was given December 10, Madame de Pompadour singing the part of Herminie. Two days later Quinault's *Mère coquette* was played. The really indefatigable Marquise took the part of Laurette. She made a success, even according to D'Argenson, her implacable enemy, who wrote, not without vexation: "The King, who was said to be tired of the favorite sultana, is more insane than ever about her. She has sung and played so well in the last ballets at Versailles that the King praised her publicly, and caressing her before everybody, said to her that she was the most charming woman in France."

The beginning of 1749 was signalized by the great quarrel between the dukes of Richelieu and La Vallière. The Duke de Richelieu was one of the four first gentlemen of the chamber who, in virtue of their charge, had the grand apartments of the King under their jurisdiction. Now the new theatre was constructed in the space occupied by the great stairway of the Ambassadors, which was considered an integral part of the grand apartments. Consequently, the first gentlemen of the chamber claimed

that the right to direct the theatre appertained to that one of themselves who was on duty, and that the Duke de La Vallière infringed upon this right. The Duke d'Aumont, who was on duty in 1748, raised the question, but somewhat timidly. Madame de Pompadour mentioned the matter to Louis XV., who contented himself with replying: "Let His Excellency" (the title he gave Richelieu) "come. You will see something quite different."

His Excellency made his appearance at the beginning of 1749, and as soon as he took up his functions he began a desperate struggle against the Duke de La Vallière.

"He made nothing of thwarting little Pompadour," wrote D'Argenson, "and treating her like an opera girl, having had great experience with that sort of women and with all women. Mistress as she is of the King and the court, he will torment and tire her out."

But Richelieu went too far. Some days later, D'Argenson wrote in his journal: "M. de Richelieu is too much attached to the trifles of the ballet theatre. They say he has behaved like a fool; he was too open in his antagonism to the mistress, and she has regained the upper hand. People consider her to count for as much or more than Cardinal Fleury in the government. Woe to any one who dares to pit himself against her at present! She unites pleasure to decision, and the suffrages of the principal ministers to the force of habit which is con-

stantly gaining strength in a mild and affectionate monarch. But woe to the state governed in this way by a coquette! People are exclaiming on all hands. It is kicking against the pricks to revolt in any wise against her. Richelieu has found that out; he ought to give up this trifling business of the ballet stage in order to pursue greater, more important, and more virtuous matters. It would have been enough for him to absent himself from these operas and to do so from pride, as soon as his charge was injuriously affected by them. The instructions he gave the musicians were thus worded: 'Such a person will be present at such an hour to play in Madame de Pompadour's opera.' He was worsted at every step. The real friends of those who made any pretensions advised them strongly to make their way by means of Madame the Marquise; homage must be paid to her."

Like the majority of men too much favored by women, Richelieu resembled a spoiled child. He was stingy, proud, and wilful. However, he ended by yielding. When this quarrel of etiquette was at its height, Louis XV. carelessly asked him this simple question: "Richelieu, how many times have you been at the Bastille?" — "Three times," responded the audacious courtier. But he promised himself not to go a fourth time. He submitted, therefore, and the Duke de La Vallière, who remained director of the troupe, was rewarded for his patience by the blue ribbon.

The third theatrical season ended March 22, 1749; it had cost at least a hundred thousand ecus. Louis XV., who was not always prodigal, began to find the expenses excessive. He did not get his money's worth in amusement. The fourth and last theatrical season of the little cabinets lasted from December 26, 1749, to April 27, 1750.

Madame de Pompadour had successfully attempted comedy, opera, and ballet. She wanted to add another gem to her crown. After Thalia, Euterpe, and Terpsichore, it was now the turn of Melpomene. February 28, 1750, the Marquise played the part of Alzire. Voltaire, enraptured, went to thank her for her interpretation of his work, as she was at her toilette, and addressed her in this not very original impromptu: —

"Cette Américaine parfaite
Trop de larmes a fait couler.
Ne pourrai-je me consoler
Et voir Venus à sa toilette?"

The King began to be bored by these incessant spectacles. He decided that there should be no more comedies, ballets, music, and dancing at Versailles, and that hereafter the representations should take place at the Château of Bellevue. The stage of this château was very small, and did not admit of a

[1] This perfect American
Has caused too many tears to flow.
Can I not console myself
And see Venus at her toilette?

brilliant *mise en scène.* The number of spectators had to be greatly restricted. Accustomed to a real theatre, splendid decorations, and a numerous audience, the actors and actresses no longer showed the same enthusiasm. The hour of decadence had come. However, Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Devin du Village* was very successfully played in 1753. Madame de Pompadour took the part of Colette. The next day she sent fifty louis to Jean Jacques, who thanked her in the following letter: —

"Paris, March 7, 1753. — Madame: In accepting this present, which has been sent me by you, I believe I have testified my respect for the hand from which it came, and I venture to add that of the two proofs you have made of my moderation, interest is not the most dangerous. I am with respect, etc."

The *Devin du Village* was the Swan Song. Madame de Pompadour no longer pleased Louis XV. as an actress. Hence she closed the Bellevue theatre, and her ambition became, if not to amuse, at least to interest, as a political woman, the master whose mistress she was said to be.

V

THE GRANDEURS OF THE MARQUISE DE POMPADOUR

LOUIS XV. had made his mistress what one might call a vice-queen. She had the power, luxury, riches, and adulations of royalty; everything, in fact, except its moral prestige. Surrounded by a court of ministers, prelates, and nobles, she throned it in the midst of pomp and opulence. She was the type of the woman *à la mode*, elegant, coquettish, absolute, always on show, insatiable for praise and success, thirsting for dignities, pleasures, and money; playing not merely the great lady, but the sovereign, having her courtiers, her creatures, her poets, reigning alike over the King and the kingdom.

M. Arsène Houssaye has said with justice: "Louis XV. had three prime ministers: Cardinal Fleury, the Duke de Choiseul, the Marquise de Pompadour." But the Marquise was not an ordinary prime minister; she was a prime minister doubled with a mistress. To a woman invested with this exaggerated rôle, a display of power was necessary. The favorite set herself to create around her a sort of decorum, etiquette, and factitious grandeur. Like little women

who wear enormously high heels, she made herself a pedestal. Madame d'Étioles had disappeared; nothing remained but the Marquise de Pompadour. To be a marchioness did not satisfy her, and she demanded and obtained the tabouret and the honors of a duchess. She had a box at the court theatre with a grating behind which she shut herself up tête-à-tête with the King. In the chapel a gallery in the grand tribune was reserved for her and her suite. People waited on her stairway at the hour of her toilette just as they await a ministerial audience in an ante-chamber. She used to say to the ministers: "Continue; I am satisfied with you," and to the foreign ambassadors: "Observe that on Tuesdays the King cannot see you, gentlemen, for I think you will hardly follow *us* to Compiègne."

One of the cabinets in her apartment was full of petitions. Solicitors approached her with respectful fear. The ducal mantle and velvet cap figured on the panels of her carriages. A nobleman carried her mantle and awaited her coming in the ante-chamber. A man of illustrious birth, a Chevalier d'Hénen, of the family of the Princes de Chimay, rode at her carriage door as equerry. She was served at table by a Chevalier of Saint Louis, her steward Colin, a napkin under his arm. Her chambermaid was a woman of quality, Madame du Hausset, who has left such curious Memoirs. The all-powerful favorite had not forgotten her family. Her father was ennobled in 1747. Her brother, Abel Poisson, became succes-

sively Marquis de Vandières, Marquis de Marigny, Marquis de Ménars. The marquisate not contenting him, he obtained a place created for Colbert, that of superintendent of crown buildings. He was as a patron of artists a Mecænas, an *arbiter elegantiarum.* The King, who treated him as his brother-in-law, gave him the blue ribbon and put him on an equality with the greatest nobles of the realm. Young Alexandrine, the daughter of Madame de Pompadour and M. de Étioles, was brought up at Paris in the convent of the Assumption.

The nuns showed her the greatest attention. She was addressed by her baptismal name, as was then the custom for princesses of the blood, and she was expected to make one of the most brilliant marriages in France. Madame de Pompadour desired pomp even in death. She bought a splendid sepulchre in the Capuchin convent in the Place Vendôme, Paris, from the Trémoille family. There she built a magnificent mausoleum, where her mother was interred and where she reserved a place for herself.[1]

The favorite had not simply power, but beauty; beauty, that supreme weapon. A veritable magician, she transformed herself at will. As mobile as the clouds, as changeful as the wave, she renewed and metamorphosed herself incessantly. No actress knew better than she how to compose an attitude or a coun-

[1] See the learned and remarkable work of M. Campardon: *Madame de Pompadour et la cour de Louis XV.*, 1 vol., Plon.

tenance. In her whole person there was an exquisite grace, an exceptional charm, a taste, an elegance which amounted to subtlety. La Tour, the pastel painter, is he who has best reproduced her animated, spirituelle, triumphant physiognomy, the eyes full of intelligence and audacity, the satin skin, the supple figure, the general harmony, the charming and coquettish whole.

All the splendors of luxury were like a frame to the picture. A new Danaë, the Marquise disappeared under a shower of gold. It is known exactly what she cost France from September 9, 1745, the time when her favor began, until April 15, 1764, the day of her death. M. Le Roy has discovered an authentic document,[1] containing an account of the favorite's expenses during this period of nearly twenty years. The total is 35,924,140 livres. In this list of expenses is found the pension granted to Madame Lebon for having predicted to the Marquise, then only nine years old, that she would one day be the mistress of Louis XV.

Nothing seemed fine enough for Madame de Pompadour, either in dress, lodgings, or furniture. At Versailles she secured for herself on the ground floor, on the terrace looking toward the parterre on the north, the magnificent apartments occupied by the Duke and Duchess de Penthièvre.[2] (Part of the

[1] *Curiosités historiques*, par M. Le Roy, 1 vol., Plon.

[2] See rooms 56, 57, 58, 59 of M. Soulie's Notice of the Museum of Versailles. No. 57 was the bedroom of the Marquise, No. 58 [illegible].

ministry of foreign affairs is established there at present. The minister's study is the same as that of Madame de Pompadour. Her bedchamber is now the thirteenth hall of the marshals, her ante-chamber the hall of famous warriors.)

The favorite bought a superb house in the city communicating by a passage with the apartments of the palace (it is now the hôtel des Réservoirs). In 1748 she acquired the château of Ciécy and the estate of Aunay, and in 1749 the château of La Celle, near Versailles. In 1750 she inaugurated, on the hill commanding the Seine, between Sèvres and Meudon, that enchanting abode of Bellevue, where all the arts rivalled each other to create a magic entity. The ante-chamber with statues by Adam and Falconnet; the dining-room with paintings of game and fish by Oudry; the salon decorated by Vanloo; the apartment of the Marquise, hung with Boucher's glowing pictures; the park with its parterres of rare flowers, its fine trees, grottos, and fountains, its statues by Pigalle and Coustou, its varied perspectives, its immense horizons,—all made of Bellevue a real palace of Armida. At Versailles, the Marquise obtained from the King a portion of the little park wherein to construct a gem of architecture, which she called the Hermitage; it cloaked extreme elegance under an appearance of simplicity. It had fine Persian hangings, panelled wainscotings decorated by the most skilful painters, thickets of myrtles, lilacs, and roses. This habitation is no

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[1] *Curiosités hi*

[2] See rooms 56, .
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her study.

Il unit, comme lui, la force à la douceur,
Plaît aux yeux, enchante le cœur,
Fait du bien et jamais ne change."[1]

In 1746, when Marshal de Lowendal had just taken Berg-Op-Zoom, it was Madame de Pompadour whom Voltaire felicitated on the victory, in strains like these: —

"Les esprits, et les cœurs, et les remparts terribles,
Tout cède à ses efforts, tout fléchit sous sa loi,
Et Berg-Op-Zoom et vous, vous êtes invincibles;
Vous n'avez cédé qu'à mon roi.
Il vole dans vos bras du sein de la Victoire,
Le prix de ses travaux n'est que dans votre cœur.
Rien ne peut augmenter sa gloire,
Et vous augmentez son bonheur."[2]

[1] Sincere and tender Pompadour
(For I can give you in advance
This name which rhymeth with amour
And soon will be the finest name in France),
This tokay with which Your Excellence
At Étioles regalèd me,
Beareth it not some resemblance
Unto the King who gave it thee?
It is, like him, without melange,
Joins strength to mildness, pleasant art,
Pleases the eyes, enchants the heart,
Does good and never knoweth change.

[2] Spirits and hearts and ramparts terrible,
All to his efforts yield, all bend beneath his law,
And Berg-Op-Zoom and you, you are invincible;
You have submitted only to my King.
'Tis to your arms he flies from Victory's breast,
Finds in your heart the guerdon of his toils.
His glory nothing can augment,
And you augment his happiness.

The Marquise rewarded Voltaire at the end of the same year by producing the *Enfant prodigue* in the theatre of the little cabinets, and taking the part of Lise herself. It was then that the poet, beside himself with joy, addressed the beautiful actress the following lines, which exasperated the daughters of Louis XV. and dissatisfied the King himself: —

"Ainsi donc, vous réunissez
Tous les arts, tous les dons de plaire;
Pompadour, vous embellissez
La cour, le Parnasse et Cythère.
Charme de tous les yeux, trésor d'un seul mortel,
Que votre amour soit éternel!
Que tous vos jours soient marqués par des fêtes!
Que de nouveaux succès marquent ceux de Louis!
Vivez tous deux sans ennemis
Et gardez tous deux vos conquètes!"[1]

So many madrigals were not enough. Both verse and prose were needed. In addressing to the Marquise a copy of the *Précis du siècle de Louis XV.* Voltaire inserted in it a passage, gravely congratulat-

[1] So then, you reunite
All arts, all gifts to please;
Pompadour, you embellish
The court, Parnassus, and Cythera.
Charm of all eyes, treasure of one alone,
May your love be eternal!
May all your days be marked by festivals!
May new successes mark the days of Louis!
May you both live devoid of enemies
And both preserve your conquests.

ing her upon that treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle which had so grievously offended the national sentiment: —

"It must be owned that Europe may date its felicity from the day of this peace. People will learn with surprise that it was the result of the urgent counsels of a young lady of high rank, celebrated for her charms, her singular talents, her wit, and an envied position. It was the destiny of Europe in this long quarrel that a woman began it and a woman ended it. The second has bestowed as many benefits as the first caused harm."

Can one be surprised, after this, that Madame de Pompadour should have been persuaded of her own merit, wit, and even genius; that she cherished strange illusions concerning her rôle and her character; that she took herself seriously, even tragically; that she regarded any adverse criticism of her as high treason against beauty and majesty?

With such an array of luxury and power, such a mass of riches, jewels, objects of art, such a court of ingenious and amiable courtiers, with all that could soothe her vanity, coquetry, and pride, with the ability to realize all her fancies and caprices, one might perhaps think the favorite was happy. Well! no.

VI

THE GRIEFS OF THE MARQUISE DE POMPADOUR

"I PITY you much, Madame, while all the world envies you." The person who addressed this just remark to the Marquise de Pompadour was her inseparable confidant, her lady's maid, Madame du Hausset, the woman to whom she told everything, whom she always kept near her, and to whom she said: "The King and I rely on you so fully that we pay no more attention to you than to a cat or dog, but go right on talking." The Marquise recognized the truth of her confidant's melancholy words: "Ah!" she answered, "my life is like that of a Christian: a perpetual combat." Strange comparison! Most inexact comparison! for the Christian combats for God, while the favorite was combating for the devil. This, in fact, was the cause of her sadness. The love of God consoles one for all sacrifices; but woe to the woman who makes herself the slave of a man! Madame de Pompadour placed no confidence in Louis XV., and she was right. The Maréchale de Mirepoix said to her one day: "It is your staircase that the King likes; he is used to

going up and down it. But if he found another woman to whom he could talk about his hunting and his affairs, it would be all the same to him at the end of three days."

Listen to Madame du Hausset. She says in her Memoirs: "Madame experienced many tribulations amidst all her grandeurs. Anonymous letters were often written her containing threats to poison or assassinate her; but what affected her most was the dread of being supplanted by a rival. I never saw her in greater vexation than one evening on her return from the salon of Marly. On entering, she spitefully threw down her muff and mantle, and undressed with extreme haste; then, sending away her other women, she said to me after they went out: 'I don't believe anything can be more insolent than that Madame de Coaslin. I had to play *brelan* at the same table with her this evening, and you cannot imagine what I suffered. The men and women seemed to take turns in coming to examine us. Two or three times Madame de Coaslin said, looking at me: "*Va tout*," in the most insulting manner, and I thought I should be ill when she said in a triumphant tone: "I have played kings!" I wish you had seen her courtesy on quitting me!'" Thereupon Madame du Hausset inquired what the master's attitude had been. "You don't know him, my dear," replied the Marquise; "if he were going to put her in my apartment this evening he would treat her coldly before people, and me with the greatest affec-

tion." The favorite was in constant alarm and anxiety. She believed in neither the loyalty, the love, nor the friendship of the King. Thus, as has been wittily said by M. Paul de Saint-Victor: "She spent her life in the attitude of Scheherezade, sitting beside the bed where the caliph slept, his sabre at hand. Like the head of the sultana, her favor depended on a caprice of the master, on the gay or tiresome story which she was about to tell him. And what happens in the thousand and one nights of the harem from which she is excluded? Who knows whether a firman scrawled by a grisette may not exile her to-morrow to the depths of a province?" In spite of her knowledge of frivolous trifles and her array of seductions, the Marquise could not succeed in diverting Louis XV. It is again Madame du Hausset who tells us as much: "The King was habitually very dismal and liked everything which recalled the thought of death, even though he feared it very much." This melancholy humor of the monarch distressed his mistress. "What a singular pleasure," said she, "to occupy one's self with things the very notion of which ought to be banished, especially when one leads such a happy life!" Madame de Pompadour did not reflect when she talked like this. She forgot that a debauchee can never be happy long. The sovereign and his favorite were both suffering from the same malady; their consciences were not at rest. To both of them might be applied the verses addressed by Lucretius to the Epicurean youth

of Rome, which we translate as follows: "They inhale sweet perfumes; they deck themselves with wreaths and garlands; but from the middle of the fount of pleasures rises bitterness, and sharp thorns pierce through the flowers; remorse rebukes them from the depths of their soul and reproaches them with days lost in idleness."

Of what use then were luxury and splendor to her? The Marquise was greeted by adulations in all her châteaux, all her houses. Nowhere did she find esteem. To tell the truth, all this array of factitious grandeur, all this pretence at decorum, was but a parody. Do what she might, the mistress of Louis XV. was in reality nothing but the first kept woman in the kingdom. Loaded and overwhelmed with proofs of royal munificence, she never called herself satisfied; ambition, like sensual pleasure, is insatiable. The love of money and the love of flattery never say: "It is enough!"

The sumptuous abodes the favorite found means to acquire were, after all, but monuments of her shame. Her house at Paris (now the Élysée) was styled the palace of the queen of courtesans, *ædes reginæ meretricum*. When the equestrian statue of Louis XV., with its four allegorical figures sculptured by Pigalle, was set up in the Place Louis XV., the crowd pointing out to each other these emblems of Force, Prudence, Justice, Love of Peace, said they were the four most famous mistresses of the monarch: Mesdames de Mailly, de Vintimille, de Châteauroux,

and de Pompadour, and a paper containing these verses was posted on the statue itself: —

"Grotesque monument, infâme piédestal;
Les Vertus sont à pied, et le vice à cheval." [1]

The honors heaped on her family by the all-powerful Marquise were not taken seriously. When her mother, Farmer-General Lenormand de Tournehem's mistress, died, this quatrain was circulated: —

"Ci-gît qui, sortant d'un fumier,
Pour faire sa fortune entière,
Vendit son honneur au fermier
Et sa fille au propriétaire." [2]

When her brother, Abel Poisson, metamorphosed into Marquis de Marigny and superintendent of the crown buildings, had received the blue ribbon of the Holy Spirit, people said the fish was turning blue.

In 1754 Madame de Pompadour had the misfortune of losing her only daughter, Alexandrine d'Étioles, who was only eleven years old. She would have liked to marry her to young De Vintimille, who passed as the son of Louis XV. One day she brought the two children together, as if accidentally, at Bellevue, and showing them to the King, said

[1] Grotesque monument, infamous pedestal;
The Virtues are on foot, and vice on horseback.

[2] Here lies she who, starting from a dungheap,
In order to make her fortune complete,
Sold her honor to the farmer,
And her daughter to the proprietor.

to him: "That would be a fine couple." Louis XV. received this overture more than coldly. Madame de Pompadour said afterwards to Madame du Hausset: "If he were a Louis XIV., he would make a Duke du Maine of the child, but I do not ask so much as that; a position and a ducal title is very little for his son, and it is because he is his son that I prefer him, my dear, to all the little dukes of the court. My grandchildren would share a resemblance to both grandfather and grandmother, and this blending which I expect to see will one day be my happiness." — "Tears came to her eyes in saying these words," adds Madame du Hausset.

Sainte-Beuve has poured witty contempt on this adulterous dream. "It seems to me," says the prince of critics, "that one lights unexpectedly on the perverted but persistent bourgeois vein in this wish of Madame de Pompadour; she brings ideas of affection and family arrangements even into her adulterous combinations. She has sentiments; she thinks of herself already as a most affectionate grandmother. A picture, which I would call a Greuze-Pompadour, might be made of this scene, the Marquise tearfully pointing out the two children to the King."

The favorite found it hard to renounce her cherished project of this alliance. Afterwards she thought of the young Duke de Fronsac, Richelieu's son, as a husband for her daughter. She caused

overtures to be made to the celebrated courtier. He answered by a disguised refusal. "My son," said he, "has the honor of belonging, on his mother's side, to the house of Lorraine; hence I cannot dispose of him without the consent of that family, but I shall proceed to demand it urgently if the Marquise still persists in her intentions."

Madame de Pompadour understood, and insisted no further. She planned another marriage for her daughter, who was promised to the young Duke de Pecquigny, son of the Duke de Chaulnes of the De Luynes family. But Mademoiselle d'Étioles died prematurely at the very time when the marriage was about to be contracted. She was buried in the sepulchre her mother had bought from an illustrious family. "The bones of the La Trémoille," said the Princess de Talmond, "must have been must astonished at finding fish bones (*les arêtes des Poisson*) near them."

We have seen the disgusting flatteries of which the Marquise was the object. These hyperboles of interested praise had a terrible counterpart. While the court was obsequious, Paris remained implacable. There was an incessant succession of sneers, satires, and invectives. There had been *mazarinades* of old; now there were *poissonades*. Minister Maurepas was the instigator and often the author of these violent rhymed diatribes, which made people say France was an absolute monarchy tempered by ballads. The masses avenged themselves by refrains of more than

Gallic animation. We cite one among a thousand. It was sung to the air *Trembleurs d'Isis* : —

"Les grands seigneurs s'avilissent,
Les financiers s'enrichissent,
Et les Poissons s'agrandissent;
C'est le règne des vauriens.
On épuise la finance,
En bâtiments, on dépense,
L'État tombe en décadence,
Le roi ne met ordre à rien.

"Une petite bourgeoise,
Élevée à la grivoise,
Mesurant tout à sa toise,
Fait de la cour un taudis;
Louis, malgré son scrupule,
Froidement pour elle brûle,
Et son amour ridicule
A fait rire tout Paris. . . .

"La contenance éventée,
Et chaque dent tachetée,
La peau jaune et truitée,
Les yeux froids et le cou long,
Sans esprit, sans caractère,
L'âme vile et mercenaire,
Les propos d'une commère,
Tout est bas chez la Poisson.

"Si dans les beautés choisies
Elle était des plus jolies,
On pardonne des folies,
Quand l'objet est un bijou.

Mais pour sotte créature
Et pour si plate figure
Exciter tant de murmure,
Chacun juge le roi fou."[1]

[1] The noble lords abase themselves,
The financiers enrich themselves,
The Poissons aggrandize themselves;
'Tis the reign of good-for-naughts.
They exhaust the treasury,
They waste in buildings,
The State falls into decadence,
The King sets nothing straight.

A little bourgeoise,
Brought up like a wanton,
Measuring all by her own standard,
Makes a kennel of the court;
Louis, in spite of his scruples,
Burns coldly for her,
And his ridiculous amour
Makes all Paris laugh.

A vapid countenance,
And each tooth spotted,
The skin yellow and freckled,
The eyes frigid and the neck long,
Witless and without character,
The soul vile and mercenary,
The tattle of a gossip,
All is low with *la Poisson.*

If among chosen beauties
She were one of the prettiest,
One pardons follies
When their object is a gem.
But when a ridiculous creature
And so flat a figure
Excites so many murmurs,
Every one thinks the King a fool.

Nor did people content themselves with ballads. They likewise produced long pieces of emphatic verse, distilling venom and hatred. More or less skilful imitators of Juvenal composed satires full of gall and bitterness. What specially excited the indignation of the authors of these diatribes were the representations at the theatre of the little cabinets. One of them, addressing himself to Madame de Pompadour, exclaimed: —

"Parmi ces histrions qui règnent avec toi,
Qui pourra désormais reconnaître son roi?"[1]

Another thus expressed himself: —

"Sur le trône français on fait regner l'amour.
La fureur du théâtre assassine la cour.
Les palais de nos rois jadis si respectables,
Perdent tout leur éclat, deviennent méprisables;
Ils ne sont habités que par des baladins! . . ."[2]

A pamphlet entitled "The School of Man, or parallel between contemporary portraits and those of Holy Writ," contained attacks of this sort against Louis XV.: "Too much incommoded by his greatness to take a girl from the green room, Lindor

[1] Who can hereafter recognize his King
Amid these actors who reign with thee?

[2] Love has been set upon the throne of France.
Theatric rage assassinates the court.
The palaces of our kings, once worthy of respect,
Lose all their eclat, become contemptible;
None but merry-andrews inhabit them! . . .

satisfied himself in true princely style: he had a large house with a theatre in it built expressly for him, where his mistress became a danseuse by title and office; men infatuated by the vanity of dancing women, insensate imitators of Candaules, do not fancy that the last Gyges died in Lydia."

One should read the Memoirs of the Marquis d'Argenson and those of Barbier the advocate in order to get a just notion of the hatred felt for the Marquise by both the aristocracy and the middle classes. The people despised her quite as much, and held her solely responsible for all wretchedness and every disaster. The luxury of this parvenu irritated them, and they detested her profoundly. The following quatrain expressed the popular sentiment: —

"Fille d'une sangsue et sangsue elle-même,
Poisson d'une arrogance extrême,
Étale en ce château, sans crainte et sans effroi,
La substance du peuple et la honte du roi." [1]

For those who knew how to listen, the Revolutionary storm was already rumbling in the distance.

Madame de Pompadour could not rely on her flatterers themselves. Voltaire, who had burned so much incense at the adored feet of the Marquise, who at Versailles had been her most zealous, ardent,

[1] A leech's daughter and a leech herself,
Fish of an arrogance extreme,
Parades in this château, without fear or dread,
The people's substance and the monarch's shame.

enthusiastic courtier, forgot all that in his retreat at Ferney. He chaffed at his former idol and drew a most malicious portrait of her in his poem *La Pucelle.*

Thoroughly acquainted with the tone of public opinion, since she had her own police and an arrangement with the director of the post-office, who violated the secret of letters for her, Madame de Pompadour was in despair at so many attacks. Uneasy, feverish, dissatisfied with the King and the kingdom, considering herself as a victim of destiny, a woman unjustly dealt with by fortune, spitefully angry at Frederick the Great, who scoffed at her; at Louis XV., who neglected her for the young girls of the Deer Park; at the clergy, who regarded her as a tool of hell; at the Parliaments, which disdained her; at the nobility, who saw nothing in her but an ambitious *bourgeoise;* at the middle classes, who reproached her for being immoral; at all France, which scorned her, — she suffered as much in her vanity as in her pride, and said to her confidant, Madame du Hausset: "The sorceress told me I should have time to repent before dying; I believe it, for I shall die of nothing but chagrin."

VII

MADAME DE POMPADOUR, LADY OF THE QUEEN'S PALACE

MADAME DE POMPADOUR was ready to play all parts in order to preserve her empire. To be an actress and a political woman was not enough; she willingly consented to become by turns, and simultaneously if need were, a devotee and a procuress, to favorize now the Church and now the Deer Park, to submit to every transformation, every servitude: *Omnia serviliter pro dominatione.* Never did any minister cling more firmly to his portfolio, never had any ambitious man a greater thirst for power.

Louis XV. had a substratum of religion which made the favorite uneasy. The day he insisted on her reading one of Bourdaloue's sermons she was frightened. With all her audacity she never dared to criticise the Church in the presence of the Most Christian King; for irregular as his own conduct was, he would not suffer the faith of his fathers to be insulted in his hearing. To keep her place, the Marquise would have asked nothing better than to

assume the austere demeanor of a Madame de Maintenon; but she was married, unfortunately, and so was the King, and Catholicism has never compromised with concubinage or adultery. Hence Madame de Pompadour sought to avert the difficulty. She put on a half-way devotion which was wholly worldly, made for show, a sort of compromise between God and the devil, between the Church and the boudoir, the oratory and the alcove, a spurious, derisory, hypocritical devotion, examples of which are given by many women of our own century as well as of the last.

She had determined to make a figure in the Versailles chapel from the time her favor began. She meant to shine everywhere, even before the altars. It was this that made her request the Queen's authorization to carry one of the basins at the ceremony of feet washing on Maundy Thursday, and collect the offerings at the High Mass on Easter Sunday. But easy as she was where no one but herself was concerned, Marie Leczinska became severe where God was in question: she refused.

The Jubilee of 1751 redoubled the anxieties of the Marquise. D'Argenson wrote, February 2: "People assert that the King will gain his Jubilee and make his Easter Communion. The Marquise says there is no longer anything but friendship between the King and her, and that they will put a fortnight's retreat and truce even to this friendship." The attitude of a repentant Magdalen would not have suited a

woman like Madame de Pompadour. She was willing enough for a little devotion, but of an elegant and worldly sort, ostentatious and luxurious. The theatre, in a word, pleased her much better than the church. D'Argenson wrote again, February 6: "All Paris has been talking of the representation of *Thétis et Pélée*, eight days ago, at which the Marquise de Pompadour was present. The actors addressed her directly in the gallant parts, such as, 'Reign, beautiful Thetis!' This she received with a triumphant air which a woman of different extraction would not have assumed; for some feed their vanity on what others could not endure without shame." But what afflicted the haughty favorite was the thought that all this success might topple over in an instant, like a house of cards. At the very time when, always an actress, even under the deceptive appearances of her so-called repentance, she was having a statue of herself as the goddess of Friendship made for Bellevue, she had several attacks of fever—people called it the Jubilee fever.

Madame de Mailly, the woman with whom Louis XV. had begun his scandalous life, was at this time at her last extremity. One reads in the Memoirs of the Marquis d'Argenson, under date of March 27, 1751: "Madame de Mailly, former mistress of the King, is dying. It was thought she was better, but the inflammation of the lungs is increasing, and she has a hopeless fever. The King has not even once sent openly to make inquiries, but the Marquis de

Gontaud has bulletins four times a day and transmits them to the King, who is afraid of offending Madame de Pompadour. I am convinced he will be much affected by her death. The pious people, those who believe in Providence, remark that, the King having had the three sisters, they have all died young. This one, who was the first, and not incestuous, is dying piously and the death of the just: it is even through her religious practices that she contracted her malady; apparently she will have a holy death. The other two died in horrible anguish, and much younger. People reflect also that God is so desirous of the King's conversion, that this death happens just in the Jubilee time, so as to touch His Majesty, already prepared by sermons and disposed to make his Jubilee sincerely. However, in the cabinets, divertisements and ballets are still going on secretly."

In Barbier's journal are encountered similar reflections on the terrors of the Marquise: "Everybody," he writes, "is carefully watching for what will happen at the Jubilee. They say Madame de Pompadour dreads the results of it. There are many at the court, not merely ecclesiastics, but men and women who are expecting this event to ruin the Marquise, whose abuse of her position has for some time gained her the hatred of all the nobles. The King can hardly remain at Versailles without making his Jubilee. Public prejudice is carried to the point of respecting the Jubilee more than the Easter duties which are of obligation. If he makes his Jubilee, he

cannot well return to the château of Bellevue a fortnight later, and a month's absence would be dangerous. There are lovers of the court who are now forming a plan to find a new mistress for the King after the Jubilee; for, melancholy as it may be, he must have some diversion; and if he should altogether fear the devil and decide on amendment, this would be not at all amusing for the nobles. This event, then, which is not far distant, is what is agitating the public high and low."

Madame de Mailly breathed her last March 30. In her will she had asked to be buried in the cemetery, among the poor, and to have a wooden cross. The Marquis d'Argenson writes: "These austerities, penances, and poverty increase the adverse opinion against her who now occupies her former place and whose conduct is so very different. It is also remarked, for the honor of religion, that Madame de Mailly, who was often subject to fits of ill temper, which was the cause of her being banished by the King, had become as mild and equable as possible. People say that if she was not holy, no other woman ever will be."

But Madame de Pompadour was once more victorious. The King did not allow himself to be touched by the death of his former mistress, and, spite of the warnings of heaven, he did not make his Jubilee. Still the Marquise was not tranquil. D'Argenson wrote, December 11, 1752: "Madame de Pompadour has been spitting blood since her youth. *Et in pec-*

cato concepit eam mater sua. She is becoming as dry as a stick, and one can see her growing thin with jealousy." And September 17, 1753: "The King is becoming superstitiously devout, respecting the clergy more than morals. Marshal de Richelieu said to me in a jesting way: 'The King shows angelic devotion. He won't do anything without the episcopate in the affairs of Languedoc.'"

Madame de Pompadour no longer appealed to the senses of Louis XV. Sensuality failing her, she would have liked to be able to press religion into her service. She sought to create a new rôle for herself as favorite, more minister than mistress; to legitimate by duration as well as by a certain decorum her liaison with the King; to assume, in brief, an attitude as friend, counsellor, I might almost say matron.

Negotiating her conversion with the Jesuits as if it were a diplomatic affair, she demanded as a condition *sine quâ non*, that she should remain at Versailles. But here was the difficult point. The clergy, even at a period of abasement, retained their principles, and the Church would not be the dupe of a woman. But one thing, the absolution of a priest, was needful to enable her to go on playing her part as companion to the King, female minister, peacemaker between the King and the royal family, the Crown and the Parliaments, the clergy and the philosophers. All she had to do to merit and obtain this absolution was to withdraw from the court. But the Marquise would have preferred death to

retreat. The atmosphere of Versailles was indispensable to her. Far from the scene of her sorry triumphs she would have expired in rage and despair. Louis XV. well knew that to dismiss her would be to kill her. Therefore he kept her near him, but solely through compassion.

Madame de Pompadour had put herself in communication with a Jesuit, Père de Sacy, whom she had formerly known, and from whom she hoped to gain, not only absolution, but permission to remain at the palace of Versailles. As, in the preceding reign, the "mistress thundering and triumphant," Madame de Montespan, had been seen to humble herself before a simple curé, the all-powerful Marquise de Pompadour was now seen humbly soliciting a Jesuit. Père de Sacy remained firm: he would not let himself be moved by the fine protestations of the Marquise. It was in vain to show him that the communications between the apartments of the King and the favorite were now walled up; useless for the partisans of loose morality and worldly religion to say to him that he must not discourage repentance; that too much severity would spoil all; that the Church had need of Madame de Pompadour against the Encyclopedists; in a word, that there ought to be such a thing as compromising with heaven. The Jesuit rejected this theory of relaxation and culpable condescension. He reminded his pretended penitent that she had a husband still living, — a husband of whom she could not complain, and that her place

was not at the palace of Versailles, but at the side of M. Lenormand d'Étioles. This annoying souvenir exasperated the favorite, infuriated by the conjugal phantom that rose before her, and thwarted all her plans. When she was convinced that, in spite of her feminine tricks, she could never bend Père de Sacy, she dismissed him;[1] and undoubtedly the admirable conduct of the Jesuits was one of the causes which brought about the expulsion of the order a few years later. Madame de Pompadour was vindictive. She never pardoned any one who had the audacity to displease her.

Could one believe it? The favorite pushed her assurance to the point of posing as a victim. To credit her, people were unjustly opposing obstacles to her conversion and that of the King. Priests who refused absolution in this way were enemies of the throne and the altar. At the same time, she shamelessly solicited a place as lady of the Queen's palace. Marie Leczinska's obligingness had already been carried too far. This time the good Queen made some observations. To receive to a place of honor a woman separated from her husband, a person who could not even claim to receive the benefits of the general communion, was an ignominy to which Louis XV. could not really wish to condemn a Queen of France. Accomplished intriguer as she was, Madame de Pompadour was not yet discouraged. She declared her

[1] *Clément XIV. et les Jésuites*, by M. Crétineau-Joly.

willingness to be reconciled with her husband, at the same time secretly acquainting M. Lenormand d'Étioles that he would do well to refrain from accepting such an offer. The letter she wrote him was replete with the finest sentiments. As much as she had scandalized society by her separation, so much she promised to edify it hereafter by an irreproachable union with her husband. But this promise was only a feint. Moreover, M. d'Étioles was hardly anxious to take back his wife. He might have applied to her the idea expressed in this line of a modern tragedy: —

Et mon indifférence a tué mon mépris.
And my indifference has slain my scorn.

It was long since the woman who had ceased to bear his name and whose desertion had once rendered him so unhappy, had excited in him either anger or resentment. He had wept for Madame d'Étioles. But Madame d'Étioles had been dead more than ten years, and he did not know Madame the Marquise de Pompadour. Nor had he any desire to know her. What he was told about her in nowise tempted him. He greatly preferred a former dancer at the opera, Mademoiselle Rem, with whom he lived maritally, and for whose sake he had refused the embassy from France to Constantinople.

Madame de Pompadour triumphed. The really guilty person, said she, was her husband. He and

he alone committed the sin, he who refused to open his arms to a repentant spouse. She could not re-enter the conjugal abode by force. Hence the Queen could have no complaint against her, and no opposition could be made against her obtaining, after having received absolution, that place as lady of the palace, which was the height of her desires. She formally received her Easter communion at the church of Saint Louis, Versailles. But it was not Père de Sacy who heard her confession, but another priest.

"I had been surprised," writes Madame du Hausset, "for some time past to see the Duchess de Luynes coming secretly to Madame. Afterwards she came openly; and one evening, Madame having gone to bed, called me and said: 'My dear, you are going to be very well contented, the Queen is giving me a place as lady of the palace; to-morrow I am to be presented; you must make me look very handsome.' I knew that the King was not quite so much at his ease about it; he was afraid of scandal and that people might think he had forced the Queen to make this nomination. But there was nothing of that sort. It was represented to the Princess that it would be an heroic act on her part to forget the past; that all scandal would be obliterated when it was seen that an honorable position was what retained Madame at court, and that this would be the best proof that nothing but friendship existed any longer between the King and his

favorite. The Queen received her very well. The pious sort flattered themselves that they would be protected by Madame, and for some time sang her praises. . . . This was the time when Madame appeared to me the most contented. The devotees made no scruples about visiting her and did not forget themselves when opportunity offered. . . . The doctor (Quesnay) laughed at this change of scenes and made merry at the expense of the devotees. 'And yet,' I said to him, 'they are consistent and may be in good faith.' 'Yes,' said he, 'but they ought not to ask for anything.'"

The Marquise de Pompadour, who had had the tabouret and the honors of a duchess since 1752, received her brevet as lady of the Queen's palace February 7, 1756. She began the next day her week of attendance on Marie Leczinska, at the state dinner in a superb costume.

D'Argenson, whose morality is often peculiar, finds the thing natural enough. He approves rather than criticises. "Sunday evening," he writes, "the Marquise de Pompadour was declared at Versailles lady of the Queen's palace, whence it is conjectured that she is no longer the King's mistress. It is even said that she begins to talk devotion and Molinism, and is going to try and please the Queen as much as she has the King. All this confidence which has been evident during the three years since the King began to have new mistresses is merely the reward of the sweetness and humility with which

she has accepted her lover's infidelities. This is only precarious and mere pretence, or, rather, it comes from a sentiment of friendship, good taste, and gratitude, and a good-nature in which love counts for nothing. But these reasonable sentiments can accomplish much in a sensible and well-ordered heart like that of the King." Here one gets the sum of the morality of the eighteenth century. What could be expected of a society in which even worthy men could use such language and show such complaisance?

VIII

MADAME DE POMPADOUR AND THE ATTEMPT OF DAMIENS

MADAME DE POMPADOUR was destined to "live in the midst of alarms." For nearly a year she had been congratulating herself on the cleverness with which she had carried by assault the post of lady of the Queen's palace, and had dismissed the confessors, of whom she thought she had no more need, when an unforeseen event was very near making her lose all the ground she had so painfully acquired.

Toward six o'clock in the evening of January 5, 1757, Louis XV. had just come down the little staircase leading from his apartments to a vestibule facing the marble court, and was about to enter a carriage, when he was struck by a penknife in the hand of a person named Damiens, who, either through folly or fanaticism, wished not to kill him, but to give him a warning. The King thought himself mortally wounded. He belonged to that category of Christians who are never pious but when they are sick. When in good health they say: "There is

always time to repent." But if danger threatens them, they tremble, they go to confession, they become saints for the time being, reserving the privilege of resuming their vicious habits as soon as their health returns. When he thought death was facing him, Louis XV. expressed himself in terms worthy of the Most Christian King. At Metz he had been sublime. He was not less eloquent at Versailles. The noblest maxims were on his lips, the most beautiful sentiments in his heart. He named his son lieutenant-general of the kingdom, and said to him with emotion: "I leave you a very disturbed realm; I hope that you may govern it better than I have done." He melted into tears of edification and admiration all those who came near him. This was no longer the man of the Deer Park; it was the son of Saint Louis.

One of his first words after being struck was a cry for a priest. His Jesuit confessor, Père Desmarets, was not just then at Versailles. A priest of the Grand-Commun was summoned (the ecclesiastics who acted as chaplains to those persons in the King's service who were lodged in the apartments called Grand-Commun). Louis XV. made his confession first to this priest, and again to Père Desmarets, who arrived in great haste from Paris.

Louis XV. had received only a trifling wound. Damiens, who might have killed him, had not wished to do so. He had two blades on one handle, a large one and a small one, and had used only the latter.

The doctor said that if the wounded man were not a king, he might go about his affairs the next day. But the imagination of Louis XV. was easily excited. When the wound had been probed, and he was assured that it was not very deep, he exclaimed: "It is deeper than you think, for it goes clear to the heart." Baron de Besenval relates in his Memoirs that when the doctors had no longer the least anxiety, that of the King was such that, believing himself dying, he made the Abbé de Rochecour, the chaplain of the neighborhood, give him absolution every moment.

Louis the Well-Beloved was not as yet Louis the Well-Hated. Barbier says there was general consternation at Paris; everybody lamented. The archbishop commanded the devotions of the forty hours in all the churches. The priests and monks, suffocated by emotion, could hardly intone the *Domine salvum fac regem.*

What was happening to Madame de Pompadour all this time? She remained in her apartment in the palace of Versailles, but she had not even dared solicit the favor of seeing the royal sufferer. She knew that Louis XV. was no longer the same man when he was ill, and that it took him only a moment to become once more a devotee. Remembering what had happened at Metz at the time of the ignominious banishment of the Duchess de Châteauroux, she was convinced that she was about to go into exile, and nearly everybody believed the same.

"The people," says Madame du Hausset, "received the news of the assault on the King with furious cries and the utmost despair; one could hear them crying under the windows from Madame's apartment. They came in crowds, and Madame dreaded the fate of Madame de Châteauroux. Her friends came constantly with tidings. For that matter, her apartment was like a church, which everybody thought he had a right to enter. They came to see how she took it, under pretence of interest, and Madame did nothing but weep and faint away. Doctor Quesnay never left her, nor I either."

What was at this moment the attitude of the three principal ministers, Count d'Argenson (brother of the author of the Memoirs), Minister of War, M. de Machault, Keeper of the Seals, Minister of Justice, and Abbé de Bernis, who had been appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs three days before the assault? The first was the sworn enemy of the Marquise. He caught at the chance for vengeance. The second was under obligations to the Marquise, but, believing she would henceforth be powerless, he declared against her in order to salute the Dauphin's rising sun. The third did not abandon the woman to whom he owed the portfolio he had just obtained. He wrote to M. de Choiseul this singular letter, in which the words "honor" and "virtue" are employed strangely enough: "The King has been assassinated, and all that the court has seen in this frightful event is a favorable moment for driving away our friend.

Every intrigue has been brought to play on the confessor. There is a tribe at court who are always awaiting the Extreme Unction. in order to try to augment their importance. Why should devotion be separated so from virtue? Our friend can no longer scandalize any one but fools and knaves. It is of public notoriety that friendship has supplanted gallantry these five years back. It is pure bigotry to go back into the past to impugn the innocence of the actual connection. This is founded upon his need of being able to open his heart to a proved and trusty friend who is, in the divisions of the Ministry, the sole point of reunion. What ingrates I have seen, my dear Count, and how corrupt our time is! Perhaps there have never been more virtues in the world, but there has been more honor."

Count d'Argenson and M. de Machault did not like each other, but they were in agreement respecting the Marquise. If Madame de Pompadour was in nowise astonished by the conduct of the first, whose detestation of her she had long been aware of, the defection of the second, who had been her creature, put her beside herself, "Is that a friend?" she exclaimed in amazement.

On being left alone with M. de Machault, after the dressing of his wound, Louis XV. charged him, as a friend of his favorite, not to send her an order to depart, but to personally advise her to do so. The Keeper of the Seals called therefore on the Marquise. The interview lasted half an hour. The result was

anxiously awaited, and the Abbé de Bernis had returned to learn what passed. But Madame du Hausset shall tell the story. Nobody is so interesting as ear and eye witnesses.

"Madame rang; I entered, followed by the Abbé. She was in tears. 'I have got to go away, my dear Abbé,' said she. I made her take some orange flower water in a silver goblet, because her teeth were chattering. Afterwards she told me to call her equerry, and she gave him her orders tranquilly enough to have her house at Paris prepared for her, and to tell all her people to be ready to start, and her coachmen not to absent themselves. A few minutes later the Maréchale Mirepoix came in: 'What are all these trunks for?' she exclaimed. 'Your people say you are going away?' 'Alas! my dear friend, the master wills it, according to what M. de Machault has told me.' — 'And what is his own opinion?' said the Maréchale. 'That I should go without delay.' During this time I was undressing Madame unaided, she wishing to be more at ease on her sofa. 'He wants to be master, your keeper of the seals,' said the Maréchale, 'and he is betraying you; who gives up the game loses it.'" This language made the clever Marquise thoughtful. Quesnay came in afterwards, "and with his monkey-like air, having heard what had been said, he recited the fable of a fox who, dining with some other animals, persuaded one of them that his enemies were hunting for him, so as to snatch his part in his absence. I did not see Madame

again until very late, at the hour of her couchee. She was calmer."

However, it was not yet known whether the favorite would not end by being disgraced. Her enemy, Count d'Argenson, seemed to possess the intimate confidence of the sovereign. The King had given him his keys that he might look for the secret papers at Trianon, and the Count's brother, the Marquis d'Argenson, wrote in his Memoirs, January 15, 1757, ten days after the assault: "It is true that since the assassination of the King, the Marquise has not seen His Majesty for a single instant. She endures her disgrace by concealing it; but little by little she will be abandoned. She has neither seen nor received a billet from His Majesty, who no longer seems to think of her. Meanwhile the King sees his confessor, Père Desmarets, every day, and has made declarations of friendship and good conduct to the Queen. All this smacks of a change at court. M. the Dauphin has entered the Council and is gaining credit there." The former Minister of Foreign Affairs was deluding himself. On the very day when he wrote these lines, the Marquise saw Louis XV. again and resumed her former domination, as the Minister of War was presently to become aware. "The great talent at court," says the Baron de Besenval, "is to be a good judge of circumstances and know how to profit by them. M. d'Argenson deceived himself in this; he should have reflected that the ill-grounded terror of the King might pass as quickly as it came, and that he

would seek to resume power as promptly as he had abandoned it. This is the way with all feeble souls. The minister forgot this truth. In the first council held after the attempt on the King, M. d'Argenson proposed, in presence of M. the Dauphin, who presided, that the ministers should hold their deliberations in the apartments of this prince, as lieutenant-general of the kingdom, until the complete recovery of the King. It resulted from this fault that M. the Dauphin, who was not very susceptible of ambition, was not at all grateful to the minister for his proposal, and that the King, hardly convalescent as yet, found his heart again replenished with that displeasure which his son had always inspired in him; that he withdrew him from affairs and never forgave M. d'Argenson for the mark of devotion he had given him on this occasion. When one dares to be ungrateful, he ought at least to be more adroit about it."

As Baron de Besenval again remarks, "a mistress removed is not yet to be despised, and love has its caprices and returns as prompt as those of fortune." Madame de Pompadour stayed where she was. The Minister of War and the Keeper of the Seals were sacrificed to her. The favorite made a tearful scene in presence of Louis XV. One would have thought she was going to faint. Madame du Hausset went to fetch her some of Hoffman's drops. The King himself arranged the dose with sugar and presented it to the Marquise in the most gracious manner.

She ended by smiling and kissed the hand of the gallant monarch, who consoled her.

Two days later, Count d'Argenson received the following letter from the King: "Your service is no longer necessary to me. I order you to send me your resignation as Secretary of State for War and all which concerns the employments thereunto adjoined, and to retire to your estate of Ormes."

Things resumed their customary course. At the end of January, 1757, the advocate Barbier wrote in his journal: "The King is perfectly well. Madame the Marquise de Pompadour has not quitted Versailles. A few days after his recovery the King paid her a visit of a quarter of an hour, but since he holds his councils as usual he has resumed his own occupations; he has hunted several times, and the little suppers have begun again." The chronicler, often cynical, concludes as follows: "Notwithstanding the criticisms of evil-minded persons, the best thing that could happen to both him and us, that is to all good citizens, would be for him to banish from his mind a misfortune which ought not to affect one, and continue his ordinary dissipations."

Baron de Besenval's conclusion must also be quoted: "Thus in the whole of this affair, M. d'Argenson had been willing to sacrifice the King to the Dauphin in order to prolong his own power. The King had been willing to sacrifice his mistress to public opinion and the terrors which disturbed his mind. M. de Machault consented to sacrifice

Madame de Pompadour, his friend, by giving her advice which might please the monarch. And in the end everything was sacrificed to love, which is what happens and will happen always." Here the word "love" is not accurate; "habit" is what he should have said.

Once more the favorite had triumphed; but in her victory she bore a mortal grudge against the Jesuits who had nearly succeeded in banishing her. She began that underhand but violent struggle against them which, a few years later, was to result in the suppression of their order. She had the audacity to forward secretly to the Pope a note which was a censure on their conduct and, if one can believe it, a defence of her own. This note, a copy of which has been discovered in the papers of the Duke de Choiseul, is a veritable monument of cynicism or else of a perverted conscience. It proves in the woman who conceived it an entire lack of moral sense, a forgetfulness of the most elementary decorum, and of the respect which unbelievers themselves owe to religion.

This curious document opens as follows: —

"At the beginning of 1752, determined by motives which it is useless to give an account of, to no longer preserve for the King any sentiments but those of gratitude and the purest attachment, I declared as much to His Majesty, supplicating him to cause the doctors of the Sorbonne to be consulted, and to write to his confessor that he might

consult with others, in order that I might be left near his person, since he desired it, without being exposed to the suspicion of a weakness which I no longer had."

So then, to credit Madame de Pompadour, she had become a type of modesty and Christian renunciation. She adds: "Things remained in appearance just as they had been until 1755. Then, prolonged reflections on the evils which had pursued me, even amidst the greatest good fortune; the certainty of never arriving at happiness by worldly goods, since none had ever been lacking to me, and yet I had never attained to happiness; detachment from the things which had most amused me, — all induced me to believe that the only happiness is in God. I addressed myself to Père de Sacy as to a man fully penetrated with this verity; I bared my soul completely to him; he tried me in secret from September to the end of January, 1756. During this time he proposed that I should write a letter to my husband, the rough draft of which, drawn up by himself, I still have. My husband refused ever to see me."

The Marquise then complained to the Sovereign Pontiff of Père de Sacy, who, according to her, was the victim of intrigues of every sort, and guilty of having told her that he would refuse her the sacraments so long as she did not leave the court. She added, in speaking of Damiens's crime: "The abominable 5th January, 1757, arrived, and was followed

by the same intrigues as in the previous year. The King did all in his power to bring Père Desmarets to the verity of religion. The same motives being at work, the response was not different; and the King, who earnestly desired to fulfil his duties as a Christian, was prevented from doing so, and soon after relapsed into the same errors, from which he would certainly have been extricated had they acted in good faith."

Perhaps all is not hypocrisy in this note. I incline to believe that in spite of her idolatry for the court, the favorite recognized its miseries and nothingness. How many persons remain vicious while knowing well that vice produces their unhappiness! How many passionate people own to themselves that their passions are killing them! O Ambition! cries Saint Bernard, by what spell does it happen that, being the torment of a heart where thou hast taken birth, and where thou dost exert thine empire, yet there is no person whom thou dost not please, and who does not allow himself to be taken by surprise by the flattering attraction thou dost offer him. *O ambitio, quo modo omnes torquens omnibus places?*

It would have been easy to reply to the Marquise de Pompadour that if the grandeurs of this world gave her so little satisfaction, all she had to do was to withdraw from the court. Hence the Pope remained untouched by all this display of Christian philosophy. He could not make up his mind to consider the mistress of Louis XV. as a repentant

Magdalen; and, far from blaming the Jesuits who had refused her absolution, he approved them. The haughty favorite did not admit that she was beaten. She kept silence, swearing, however, that she would be avenged.

IX

MADAME DE POMPADOUR AND DOMESTIC POLITICS

AT home as well as abroad, in parliamentary and clerical quarrels, as in questions of external politics, Madame de Pompadour's ideas were always undecided, inconsistent, variable. For that matter, it is not easy to find in a pretty woman the qualities needful to manage public affairs well. With very few exceptions, fashionable women are fickle, wilful, excessively impressionable, capricious, like nearly all persons who are flattered. If they meddle with government, their half-knowledge is more dangerous than complete ignorance. They have infatuations, foregone determinations; their mania for protecting makes them obstinate in sustaining undeserving favorites. Their most serious determinations often depend on trifles. A well-turned compliment influences them more than a good reason; they are the dupes of any one who knows how to flatter them without seeming to do so, and who can find more or less ingenious pretexts for justifying their whims or palliating their faults. Such was Madame de Pompadour.

Is it not curious to see this futile woman leaving her gimcracks and gewgaws to interfere in the most arduous theological or governmental questions, to pose as an arbiter between the magistracy and the clergy, the throne and the altar? "Certes," writes D'Argenson in a style well worthy of the epoch, "it is better to see a beautiful nymph at the helm than a villainous crouching ape such as the late Cardinal Fleury. But these fair ladies are as capricious as white cats, which caress you at first and afterwards scratch and bite you." Madame de Pompadour acted like that with the Parliament; sometimes she caressed, sometimes she clawed it.

The interminable struggle between secular jurisdiction and ecclesiastical discipline had all the ruthlessness, all the asperity, of a civil war. A society at once incredulous and fanatical grew excited over theological questions worthy of Byzantium, and even in the heart of the Seven Years' War there were at Paris, as Voltaire remarks, fifty thousand fanatics who did not know in what country flowed the Danube and the Elbe, and who thought the universe turned upside down by the contradictory propositions of the adepts of Jansenism and the disciples of Molina.[1]

The question, however, was more serious than one might be inclined to believe. Jansenism, that third

[1] See the very learned and complete work of M. Jobez: *La France sous Louis XV.* Six vols., Didier.

estate of religion, as it has been so justly called, was nothing more or less than a preliminary step toward republican doctrines. "Do not believe," said Bossuet, apropos of the English revolution, "that it is simply the quarrel of the Episcopate, or some intrigues against the Anglican liturgy which have moved the common people. These disputes were as yet only feeble commencements whereby turbulent spirits made a trial of their liberty; but something more violent was stirring in the depths of men's hearts; it was a secret disgust for all that had been authority, and an itching to innovate incessantly after the first example had been seen."

French Jansenism had the haughty chagrin, the indocile curiosity, the spirit of revolt, which characterized the Protestantism of England. Louis XIV., so jealous of his royal prerogatives, had seen this at once. He felt that discipline is as indispensable to the Church as to the barracks, and comprehended that the throne has the same foundations as the altar. The thing aimed at by the bull *Unigenitus* of 1713 was to re-establish unity in doctrines; and when the Jansenists refused to submit to the decree of the Sovereign Pontiff, the great King said that this rebellion against the Pope would give rise to attacks against the monarchical principle. He was not mistaken. If the Parliament showed itself favorable to Jansenism, it was far less on account of such or such ideas on free will or grace, than by instinctive liking for the revolutionary spirit which existed in germ in

the new sect. Religious controversies were to lead by slow degrees to political controversies. The Parliament led to parliamentarism. People began by contemning the episcopal jurisdiction of an archbishop in order to end by braving the authority of a king.

Christopher de Beaumont, that convinced priest, that austere and inflexible prelate, so firm against the temptation of grandeurs that Louis XV. had been obliged to summon him thrice in order to make him leave his diocese of Vienne, in Dauphiny, and accept the archbishopric of Paris, Christopher de Beaumont was faithful to the traditions of the Church when he denied all competence over matters purely religious, such as the administration of sacraments, to the Parliament. His doctrine was after all only that of the separation of the powers. Louis XV. inclined to the views of the Archbishop, whose virtues he appreciated. Like Louis XIV., he recognized the bull *Unigenitus*, and treated Jansenism as a heresy. Like Louis XIV., he suspected, not without reason, both the Parliament and the Parisian population. "I know the people of Paris," said he; "they must have remonstrances and shows, and perhaps worse than that some day." Madame de Pompadour would have taken the part of the Archbishop, as the King wished to do, if the Archbishop had been a courtier; but Christopher de Beaumont would rather have died than compromise with concubinage and adultery. He could not understand a

prelate's stooping before a royal favorite, and the idea of soliciting a Pompadour would have made him blush. He preferred to be twice exiled. "The Queen," wrote D'Argenson in December, 1754, "Monseigneur the Dauphin, and all the royal family are greatly troubled by the exile of the Archbishop of Paris; the Queen weeps over it every day." Christopher de Beaumont received numerous visits in his exile at Conflans. The orthodox considered him the upholder of the faith. The King admired the Archbishop, but did not sustain him. D'Argenson wrote, March 6, 1756: —

"The motto *Dividatur* might be recommended for the personal government of Louis XV. He received this spirit of compromise from Cardinal Fleury. All his forces run to that. . . . Hence, doing good only half way, he also does evil half way, which produces a chaotic state of things, and the worst effect." With this system the monarch dissatisfied the magistracy and the clergy at the same time. By turns he banished the Parliament and the Archbishop. The curés continued to refuse the sacraments to the Jansenists. The magistrates sent their bailiffs' men and caused the sick to be communicated surrounded by bayonets. The Eucharist was abandoned to derision by the parties to the strife. The court fluctuated between the two opinions. After having sent the Archbishop of Paris to Conflans, Louis XV., although leaving him in disgrace, pronounced in his favor.

In a bed of justice held December 13, 1756, the

King forbade the Parliament to decree the administration of the sacraments, to convene general assemblies, to interfere with the course of justice, to suspend the registration of edicts. He suppressed the chambers of inquests, and declared that he would punish any who would not obey. One hundred and fifty members of the Parliament sent in their resignations. All Paris was in commotion. A riot was momentarily expected. Nothing was heard but oaths and curses. The Parliament and Jansenistic diatribes had the result of exciting Damiens to the insanity of fanaticism. He thought that in striking Louis XV. he was acting for God and the people. Madame de Pompadour, still more versatile than the King, was at this time the enemy of the Parliament. However, the exile of the Archbishop continued, because nothing could induce him to curry-favor with the favorite. The charge which he sent from Conflans to Paris displeased the Marquise.

"Let us enter into our own selves, my dear brethren," said he, "and see whether the aberrations of our own minds and hearts have not drawn upon us so terrible an effect of the divine wrath. Examine without prejudice what has been deserved by so many errors diffused among the public, so much license in speech, such blasphemies against God and His Christ, such disputing against the known truth, such scandals in every condition and of all kinds; observe, in particular, whether, since the weakening of faith among us, a multitude of principles tending

to disobedience and even to rebellion against the sovereign and his laws have not insinuated themselves into men's minds and books. It would be easy for us to remind you of the maxims of the holy doctors which have never ceased to inspire those sentiments of fidelity that are due to earthly princes; the decisions of councils which have anathematized every doctrine capable of revolting peoples against the sovereign; the perpetual instructions of pastors, who have always said with the great Apostle: Obey your temporal masters in all things. . . . What are we to think of the execrable crime which has been conceived in the bosom of the country and executed under our eyes? What must be our indignation at the memory of a treasonable attempt, deliberately planned, and made in that palace where everything announces the majesty of the sovereign?"

This truly evangelical language was the admiration of the Queen, the Dauphin, and all pious people. But it seemed like a satire to the protectress of the philosophers, the friend of Voltaire and Quesnay, the patroness of the Encyclopedia. Louis XV. was in reality of the Archbishop's opinion. He recalled him in October, 1757. But, faithful to his system of compromises, he permitted those members of the Parliament who had resigned to resume their functions. The Archbishop, constantly pursued by the animadversions of the favorite, was exiled a second time, from January, 1758, to October, 1759. The inflexible prelate conceded nothing in point of doctrine.

"Let them erect a scaffold in the midst of the court," he exclaimed; "I would ascend it to maintain my rights, fulfil my duties, and obey the laws of my conscience."

The quarrels over the bull *Unigenitus* were at last appeased; but religious authority was weakened at the same time as royal authority. Emboldened by their polemics, the members of the Parliament began gradually to pose as protectors of liberties and censors of absolute monarchy. Some of the nobles, on the lookout for popularity, such as D'Argenson, Choiseul, and other disciples of Voltaire, fancied that the aristocracy could retain their privileges if the clergy lost theirs. Louis XV., who foresaw the coming cataclysms, was under no such illusion: at bottom he was inimical to the Parliament and friendly to the Church. If the Most Christian King sometimes showed himself indulgent toward the philosophers, it was because they flattered his mistress and sought to stupefy him while lulling his remorse.

X

MADAME DE POMPADOUR AND THE SEVEN YEARS' WAR

ONE of the principal calamities laid to the charge of Madame de Pompadour, by her contemporaries and by posterity, is the Seven Years' War. They have resolved to hold her responsible for all the bloodshed, all the disasters and humiliations, for Rossbach and Crevelt, for the loss of the colonies and the profound injury done to the military prestige and naval forces of France. There is some exaggeration in this, as we believe. It must not be forgotten that the origin of the Seven Years' War was an unjustifiable aggression of the English, who were absolutely bent on complete mastery of the seas. Madame de Pompadour was certainly not responsible for British ambition. It is true that France was not ready for strife, and that its marine had been allowed to fall into decay. But if the favorite was deceived about the resources of the country, if she cherished illusions which ruined peoples as well as individuals, she was not the only one.

The Marquis d'Argenson accuses her of having

been occupied with porcelains at a time when people should have been thinking of arms. "Madame de Pompadour," he writes in 1754, "does nothing but preach up the great advantage it has been to the State to manufacture porcelain like that of Saxony, and even to have surpassed it. A royal warehouse for this porcelain is being established in the rue de la Monnaie. There may be seen a service which the King is about to send to the King of Saxony, as if to brave and provoke him, saying that he has surpassed even his manufactory. At the King's suppers the Marquise says that it is uncitizenlike not to buy as much of this porcelain as one can pay for. Some one answered her: But while the King has been so liberal in encouraging this manufactory, those of Charleville and Saint-Étienne are abandoned, which are quite differently useful to us, since they concern the defence of the kingdom, and three-quarters of the workmen are passing into foreign countries." The reflection is, doubtless, just; but a few Saxony or Sèvres porcelains, more or less, would not greatly have altered the situation of France. It was her misfortune to be slumbering in a fatal ease. Voltaire has said: "All Europe never saw happier days than followed the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, in 1748, until toward the year 1755. Commerce flourished from St. Petersburg to Cadiz; the fine arts were everywhere in honor. A mutual confidence existed between all nations. Europe resembled a large family, reunited after its dissensions." The French allowed them-

selves to be deceived by this universal lull. Military men and diplomatists felt an exaggerated confidence. In a few years people became so accustomed to peace that they no longer even thought of war. It was the same thing that happened about a century later, at the time of the Universal Exposition of 1867. Peoples who wish to preserve their greatness ought to beware of cosmopolitan theories. While the philosophers were weaving their humanitarian dreams, England was preparing her fleets and Frederick the Great his armies.

A trifling contest between France and England for some wild lands in Canada was the kindling spark of a fire that was to inflame the four quarters of the earth. But this quarrel, insignificant in itself, was not the true cause of the war: it was at most its pretext.

To avoid a struggle with England was well-nigh impossible; but what France might have done, and did not, was to remain faithful to the alliance with Prussia, instead of plunging into one absolutely contrary to every tradition of its foreign policy, the Austrian alliance. What the diplomacy of Louis XV. lacked was consecutiveness. The versatile monarch did not know what he wanted. Sometimes Prussian, sometimes Austrian, he fluctuated between two contradictory systems. The see-saw policy creates only a momentary illusion. It succeeds for a while, but it nearly always leads to ruin. The secret of strong diplomatists is to persevere in

one idea, pursue one end, choose one good alliance, and stick to it. Feeble diplomatists, on the contrary, undo to-day what they did yesterday. It is like the web of Penelope. Whoever studies seriously the causes of our reverses, under Napoleonic France as well as under the France of the Bourbons, will easily convince himself that nearly all of them are due to incoherent principles and inconsistent ideas. To preserve a system and follow a tradition gives a real strength. The strength of Prince Bismarck is to have persevered in one idea, that of German unity, and in one alliance, that of Russia.

The policy of the Versailles treaty of 1756, which established an intimate accord between Louis XV. and Maria Theresa, was not in itself a more objectionable policy than another. But if it was desired to adopt it, it ought not to have been necessary to make war with Austria beforehand. Nothing is more dangerous than to place one's self in a self-contradictory attitude. No confidence is inspired by such variable conduct; one is at the mercy of every incident.

In politics, as in religion and literature, the prime essential is unity. It is the same thing in diplomacy as in style.

> "Ce que l'on conçoit bien s'énonce clairement,
> Et les mots pour le dire arrivent aisément." [1]

[1] What is clearly conceived is clearly expressed,
And the words to say it come easily.

What is required is a true spirit of method, a clear, precise, definite object, straight lines, an absence of tortuous proceedings.

The old maxim, "divide to reign," the presence in the same ministry of men warring against each other, of secret agents who undo the work of official agents, underhand ways, countermines, politics by double entry, — all this is no sign of strength; it is the expedient of weakness. Occult diplomacy, like that of Louis XV., is suitable to none but governments in extremity. Woe to a sovereign who suspects his own ambassadors! If he has not full confidence in them, let him change them!

What lay at the root of the character of Louis XV. was the habit of dissimulation, the vanity of being considered impenetrable. It was he, not Madame de Pompadour, who had created a government at constant war with the principal agents it made use of. Nor was the Austrian alliance a conception of the favorite's. Louis XV. did not like Frederick the Great, and he was not less taken with the flatteries of the Empress Maria Theresa than Madame de Pompadour herself. If the adroit sovereign wrote the Marquise a letter in which she treated her as a dear friend, she was careful at the same time to display a passionate admiration, a sort of cult, for Louis XV. Moreover, there was an Austrian party at Versailles. The Marquis d'Argenson wrote in January, 1756: "There is a large party in our court for the court of Vienna. Austria has always had emissaries at our

court. I hear these emissaries saying that the house of Austria is no longer what it was, that it has need of us, that we ought to march in close accord with it. I know these insinuations, and it was to opposing them that I owe my disgrace in 1747. They preach to us against the King of Prussia, they say he is all English, and they excite us against him in view of despoiling him, if we are able. Hence we sulk at Spain, we are irritated against Prussia, our veritable and sincere ally, and all this exasperates at court *femineo ululatu.*"

The partisans of the treaty of Versailles (May 1, 1756), by which France and Austria promised each other mutual aid against their enemies, have a right to extenuating circumstances. This passage from Duclos must not be forgotten: "As soon as the treaty was known, there was a sort of inebriation which was increased by the chagrin displayed by the English; every one imagined that the union of the two first powers would make all Europe respectful. Ideas have greatly changed since then."

The Abbé de Bernis, who had quitted the Venetian embassy to take the portfolio of foreign affairs, and who was one of Madame de Pompadour's favorites, was charged with drawing up the treaty. "Notwithstanding his first objections as a man of sense, he did not long resist the general movement which carried away all who surrounded him; he was dazzled, and thought he was contributing to the greatest political operation that had been attempted since

Richelieu. At first everything seemed to succeed as well as could be desired, and the new alliance so highly vaunted at court seemed to be taken even better still by the public."[1] The Marquise triumphed. She amused herself by engraving on an agate in onyx an allegory, which represented France and Austria joining hands above the altar of Fidelity, and trampling under foot the mask of Hypocrisy and the torch of Discord.

At the start, people were full of enthusiasm and confidence. The victor of Mahon was esteemed as successful in war as in love. Nothing was dreamed of but mighty feats and conquests. But presently all took on a gloomy look. The convention of Closter-Seven, so imprudently signed by Marshal de Richelieu on September 8, 1757, was the signal for unnumbered catastrophes. "One does not die of grief," wrote Bernis to Choiseul, December 13 of the same year, "for I am still alive after September 8. Since that epoch, faults have been accumulated in a fashion one can hardly explain, without supposing bad intentions. I have spoken with the greatest force to God and His saints. I excite pulses a little, and then the lethargy recommences; people open big eyes, and that is all there is about it. . . . It seems to me as if I were minister of foreign affairs in Limbo. Try, my dear count, if you can excite more than I the spirit of life which is becoming extinct in

[1] Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du Lunde*, t. viii.

us; for my part, I have dealt all my great blows, and have concluded to be in an apoplexy like the others over sentiment, without ceasing to do my duty like a good citizen and an honest man." The former abbé of the court become a minister, the once superficial man whom Voltaire used to call "Babet, the-bouquet-holder," was indignant at the general apathy and carelessness. "It is unexampled," wrote this friend of Madame de Pompadour, "that so great a game should be played with the same indifference as a game of checkers.... Sensitive, and, if I dare say it, sensible as I am, I am dying on the wheel, and my martyrdom is useless to France.... May God send us some will or other, or some one who will have one for us! I would be his valet de chambre if they liked, and with all my heart."

As soon as the struggle began, unfortunate France was amazed at the illusions she had cherished. The truth appeared to her. Bernis comprehended that the shortest follies are the best. January 6, 1758, he wrote to Choiseul, then Ambassador to Vienna: "My advice would be to make peace, and to begin by a truce on land and sea. When I shall know what the King thinks of this idea, which I have not found in my manner of thinking, but which has been presented to me by good sense, reason, and necessity, I will inform you. Meanwhile, try to make M. de Kaunitz certain of two things that are equally true; namely, that the King will never abandon the Empress, but that it will never do for him to be

ruined with her. Our respective faults have made a hopeless wreck of a great project which was infallible in the first days of September. It is a beautiful dream which it would be dangerous to carry further, but which it might some day be possible to resume with better actors and better combined military plans. The more directly I have been charged with this grand alliance, the more ought people to credit me when I counsel peace."

Unfortunately, Madame de Pompadour was headstrong, which is one of the attributes of mediocrity of mind. Confounding heroism with obstinacy, she thought that to struggle indefinitely against ill fortune, was to display greatness of soul. The more faults a general of her choice committed, the more inveterately did she uphold him. She was like those gamesters who are checked by no ill luck, and who never give up playing until they are ruined. Public opinion condemned such obstinacy. The French do not know how to support reverses. They overwhelmed Soubise, defeated at Rossbach, with sarcasms, and appeared to be infatuated with the victor. People took the fashion of exalting Frederick the Great and of cursing his enemy, Madame de Pompadour, Cotillion IV., as she was called. Soubise was the scape-goat on whom rained all the jests, chansons, and satires: —

"Soubise dit, la lanterne à la main,
J'ai beau chercher, où diable est mon armée?
Elle était là pourtant hier matin,

Me l'a-t-on prise où l'aurais-je égarée?
Ah! je perds tout, je suis un étourdi;
Mais attendons au grand jour, à midi.
Que vois-je? O ciel! Que mon âme est ravie!
Prodige heureux, la voilà, la voilà! —
Ah! ventre bleu! Qu'est-ce donc que cela?
Je me trompais, c'est l'armée ennemie."[1]

It is not by means of chansons that France can retrieve herself. She plays into the enemy's hand by showing herself more Prussian than Prussia. Bernis finds himself submerged by this deluge of criticisms and assaults. "I am threatened by anonymous letters," he wrote again to Choiseul in 1758, "with being presently torn to pieces by the people, and though I do not greatly fear such menaces, it is certain that approaching misfortunes which cannot be foreseen, could easily realize them. Our friend runs at least as much risk." Ill in body and mind, Bernis could hold out no longer; he handed in his resignation. Louis XV. accepted it in a letter dated October 9, 1758, which opened thus: "I am sorry, Monsieur the Abbé-Count, that the affairs you are charged with

[1] Soubise says, lantern in hand,
There's no use looking, where the devil is my army?
It was here yesterday morning, anyhow,
Has some one taken it or have I lost it?
Ah! I lose everything, I am a rattlepate;
But wait till broad daylight, till noon.
What do I see! O heaven! How my soul is enraptured!
Wondrous prodigy, there it is, there it is! —
Ah! zounds! What is that then?
I was mistaken, 'tis the enemy's army.

affect your health to such a point that you can no longer support the burden of the work. . . . I consent with regret to your turning over the foreign affairs to the hands of the Duke de Choiseul, whom I think to be at present the only suitable person, as I am disinclined to make an absolute change in the system I have adopted, or even to be spoken to about it."

The three women in coalition against Frederick, — Maria Theresa, Empress of Austria, Elisabeth, Empress of Russia, and Madame, the Marquise de Pompadour — carried the war as far as possible. France experienced nothing but reverses in every quarter of the globe. As Voltaire remarked, it seemed more exhausted of men and money by its union with Austria than it had been by two centuries of war against that country.[1] It must be admitted, however, that Madame de Pompadour's obstinacy was very near succeeding. It is incredible that the King of Prussia, who stood alone on the continent against the forces of Austria, France, Russia, Sweden, and half of the Empire, could long have maintained so gigantic a struggle. An unforeseen event, the death of the Empress Elisabeth of Russia, January 6, 1762, saved him. Madame de Pompadour felt that her vengeance was eluding her. It was necessary to renounce all ideas of glory and conquest, and to sign the disastrous treaties of Paris and Hubertsburg (February 10 and 15, 1763). Louis XV. gave

[1] Voltaire, *Siècle de Louis XV.*

up the cities he still possessed in Germany. He restored Minorca to England, and ceded to it Acadia, Canada, Cape Breton, the gulf and river of Saint Lawrence, Grenada, Saint Vincent, Dominique, Tobago, and the Senegal River with its factories. He only regained his Indian colonies on condition of not fortifying or garrisoning them. Finally he undertook to demolish anew the harbor of Dunkirk. The ruin of military prestige, commerce, the navy, and public credit, the loss of two hundred thousand men, several millions of money, and nearly all the colonies, — such is the balance sheet of the fatal war so ardently desired by the Marquise.

Voltaire had good reason to exclaim: "What was the result of this innumerable multitude of combats the tale of which now wearies even those conspicuous in them? What remains from all these efforts? Nothing but blood shed vainly in waste and desolate lands, villages in ruins, families reduced to beggary, and rarely does even a dull rumor of these calamities reach as far as Paris, always profoundly occupied with pleasures or equally frivolous disputes." Then, returning to the cause or rather to the pretext of the strife, the author of the *Siècle de Louis XV.* says again: "It has been thought that it would have been very easy to prevent such misfortunes by coming to terms with the English concerning a small contested ground near Canada. But certain ambitious persons, to maintain their dignity and render themselves necessary, precipi-

tated France into this fatal war. The same thing had occurred in 1741. The self-love of two or three persons was enough to lay all Europe waste. France needed peace so greatly that she regarded those who concluded it as benefactors of the country." The Duke de Choiseul remained popular because he had been able to palliate somewhat the impression caused by such reverses by concluding, in August, 1761, the family pact between the Bourbons of France, Spain, and Italy, and had also had tact enough to win the support of the fashionable literary men, the arbiters of renown. But his friend, Madame de Pompadour, was the object of public vindictiveness. Wounded in her ambition, her vanity, and her pride, she could not be consoled.

XII

MADAME DE POMPADOUR AND THE PHILOSOPHERS

ONE day some one cited in presence of Louis XV. the example of Frederick the Great, who admitted the philosophers in vogue and famous men of letters to his intimate acquaintance. "That is not the way in France," said the King, "and as there are a few more wits and great noblemen here than there are in Prussia, I should want a very big table to gather them all around it." And then he counted on his fingers: "Maupertuis, Fontenelle, La Motte, Voltaire, Piron, Destouches, Montesquieu, Cardinal de Polignac." His attention was called to the fact that he had forgotten D'Alembert and Clairant. — "And Crébillon," said he, "and La Chaussée!" — "And Crébillon the younger," cried some one; "he ought to be more amiable than his father; and then there are the Abbé Prevost, the Abbé d'Olivet." — "Very well," replied Louis XV., "for twenty-five years all of that crowd would have dined or supped with me."

Madame de Pompadour, who was acquainted with the master's dispositions, would not have made ad-

vances to the philosophers had she not been possessed by the passion for flattery. But how was she to resist compliments so well turned as those of Voltaire? This man, who in speaking of the Christian religion cried: "Crush the wretch!" kneeled to a royal mistress while enlarging the boundaries of the most insipid flattery. The censer which he wanted to banish from the churches he seized in order to wave it respectfully before the alcove of a Pompadour!

The Marquise had in her intimacy a man who never quitted her; this was Doctor Quesnay, her familiar, her guest, her confident, her physician, whom she had lodged just above her in an entresol of the château of Versailles. This little entresol, rendezvous of the boldest innovators, the most determined free-thinkers, the most ardent materialists, was the secret workshop of the future Revolution, the laboratory of disorder and destruction. There, talking, dining, declaiming, conspiring together, one met men such as D'Alembert, the chief of the Encyclopedists; Duclos, who said of the nobles who flattered him: "They are afraid of us as robbers are of street lamps with reflectors"; Helvetius, whose whole doctrine is summed up in this monstrous maxim, last word of egotism and immorality: "Man being merely a sensitive being should have but one object: the pleasure of the senses." Marmontel relates that the Marquise de Pompadour, unable to induce this troop of philosophers to come

down to her salon, came to their table instead and chatted with them.

Doctor Quesnay, her physician, was one of those peasants of the Danube, or better, to adopt a happy expression of the De Goncourts, one of those courtiers of the Danube who cloak a refined cleverness under an aspect of rudeness, and who live by the monarchy even while playing to the republicans. Strange Brutuses, contraband Catos, whose beautiful maxims can deceive none but simpletons! Rude democrats in appearance, time-servers in reality, who are proud to dine with great people and whose so-called dignity provokes a smile! Quesnay, this physical confessor, knew both the strong and the weak sides of the Marquise. He knew so well how to take her that he could quietly install in his entresol, just above the favorite's apartment, the first club, that which agitated for the first time the downfall of the Church and the monarchy.

Madame de Pompadour was full of coquetries and amiability for the most dangerous adversaries of the old régime. La Tour's pastel, which is at the Louvre, represents her seated in an armchair, her left arm resting on a table whereon are a globe and some books. The largest of these is the fourth volume of the Encyclopedia, that great arsenal of impiety, the prospectus of which had been launched by Diderot in 1750. Louis XV., always undecided, at first tolerated the gigantic collection of writings. Some years later (March, 1759) he revoked the

privileges of the editors. A royal declaration of unwonted violence appeared at the same time against the authors, printers, publishers, and colporteurs of writings aimed against religion and royal authority. Almost every line proclaimed a death penalty. But a thousand means of eluding these Draconian laws were found, and most frequently authority closed its eyes.

Voltaire cried enthusiastically: "Long life to the ministry of the Duke de Choiseul!"

Nevertheless, warnings were not lacking to the favorite. She saw as clearly as Louis XV. himself the perils which the doctrines of the Encyclopedia made imminent for all kings. Madame du Hausset relates that a very curious anonymous letter was one day sent to the King and his mistress. As the author was bent on accomplishing his purpose, he had sent one copy to the lieutenant of police, sealed with this address: *For the King;* one with these words: *To Madame de Pompadour*, and still another to M. de Marigny. This letter, which greatly affected Louis XV. and his Marquise, struck them all the more forcibly because it was written in very respectful terms. Among other remarkable passages it contained the following prediction: "The Encyclopedists, under pretext of enlightening men, are sapping the foundations of religion. All sorts of liberty depend upon each other: the philosophers and the Protestants tend to republicanism as well as the Jansenists. The philosophers attack the trunk of

the tree, the others some of its branches; but their efforts, without being concerted, will some day bring it down. Add to these the Economists, whose object is political liberty, as that of the others is liberty of worship, and the Government may find itself in twenty or thirty years undermined throughout and falling tumultuously into ruin."

These prophecies of the coming Revolution are incessantly renewed in the writings of one of the ministers of Louis XV., the Marquis d'Argenson. It is he who writes in January, 1750: "Republicanism is every day gaining on philosophic minds. People take an aversion to monarchism through demonstration. In fact, it is only slaves and eunuchs who aid monarchism by their false wisdom." And on December 20 of the same year: "See how many philosophic writers there are at present. The wind from England blows over this stuff. It is combustible. Look at the style in which Parliament remonstrances are written. These procureurs general of Parliaments, these State syndics, would at need become great men. All the nation would take fire; the nobility would gain the clergy, and then the third estate. And if necessity should arise for assembling the States-General of the realm to regulate the demands for money, these States would not assemble in vain. One should be careful; all this is very serious."

It must be owned that D'Argenson is a true prophet. Every day he accentuates his sinister pre-

dictions. September 11, 1751, he writes: "We have not, like the Romans, any Visigoths or Saracens who might invade us; but the Government may experience a revolution. Consider that it is no longer either esteemed or respected, and, which is worse, that it is doing all that is needed to ruin itself. The clergy, the army, the Parliaments, the people high and low, are all murmuring, all detaching themselves from the Government, and rightly. Things are going from bad to worse." He returns to the charge September 9, 1752: "The bad effects of our government by absolute monarchy are resulting in persuading France and all Europe that it is the worst of governments. . . . A mild but inactive prince allows the abuses to grow which were commenced by the pride of Louis XIV.; no reform when it is necessary, no amelioration, appointments blindly made, prejudices without inquiry; everything shows an increasing tendency toward national ruin. Everything is falling into tatters, and private passions are working underhand to ruin and destroy us."

Is it not a curious thing to hear, forty years beforehand, the first mutterings of the formidable tempest which was to engulf everything, — nobility, clergy, Parliaments, monarchy? We are in the year 1750. The archers have arrested, as a police measure, certain vagabond children who were begging in Paris. Suddenly a rumor spreads that abductions are multiplying and that no family is any longer in security. Popular imagination is excited, overheated. People

say that in order to restore his wasted forces the kingly debauché takes baths of children's blood, like a new Herod. Madame de Pompadour, who has been imprudent enough to come to Paris, has barely time to escape from being torn to pieces. The people want to go to Versailles and burn the château, built, as they say, at their expense. The exasperated King says that hereafter he will not pass through Paris when going to Compiègne. "What!" he cries, "shall I show myself to these villainous people who say I am a Herod!" And to avoid entering thereafter the capital of which he has conceived a horror, he establishes outside the walls the road which is now called the path of the Revolt.

The tide of anger rises — rises incessantly against the favorite. The people overwhelm her with curses; they call her the *King's hussy*. The daughters of Louis XV. designate her by a still more vulgar name. In November, 1751, the Dauphin and Dauphiness, on their way to Notre Dame, cross the bridge of the Tournelle. Some two thousand women surround them. "We are dying with hunger!" they say. "Bread! bread!" The Dauphiness trembles like a leaf. The Dauphin causes several louis to be distributed. "Monseigneur," say the women of the people, "we do not want your money. It is bread we want. We love you much. Let that wretch be sent away who is governing the kingdom and ruining it! If we had hold of her, there would soon be nothing left of her but relics."

If such were popular impressions before the Seven Years' War, it is easy to comprehend what they must have been after the national humiliations which overwhelmed unhappy France. Madame de Pompadour thought she could remedy the immense unpopularity which pursued her by flattering still more the philosophers who could blow the trumpet of Renown for her. These singular patriots, who had celebrated the glory of the victor of Rossbach as if he had been a Titus or a Marcus Aurelius, asked only one thing to console them for the afflictions, shames, and miseries of their country: a regular persecution against the Jesuits. Madame de Pompadour was ready to follow Voltaire's disciples on to this ground. She might have hesitated if the Jesuits had been her flatterers, if they had made a pretence of being her dupes, if they had concluded to play a rôle of complaisance in the comedies of her pretended repentance, if they had seemed to take her for another Maintenon, for a mother in Israel. But she did not forget that when, in 1756, she had been obliged to go to confession in order to be eligible for an appointment as lady of the Queen's palace, Père de Sacy had refused her absolution, and that when the attempt was made on the King, in 1757, Père Desmarets had nearly obliged her to leave the court. Hence the Jesuits were condemned. A Parliament decree of February 22, 1764, commanded that within eight days they should take an oath not to live any longer according to their institute, to abjure the condemned

maxims, and to hold no correspondence with their former superiors. "When the Jesuits were expelled," says Chateaubriand, "their existence was not dangerous to the State; the past was punished in the present; that often happens among men; the *Provincial Letters* had deprived the Company of Jesus of its moral force. And yet Pascal is merely a calumniator of genius; he has left us an immortal lie."

The great crime of the Jesuits was to have displeased the Marquise de Pompadour. One saw holy missionaries, untiring apostles, illustrious professors, men who had honored religion and science, old men surrounded by the esteem of all honest people, driven from their houses, deprived of all resources, expelled from France with a rigor and injustice so cruel that certain philosophers thought they could take up their defence in the name of humanity. Those Jesuits whom Madame de Pompadour was driving out, Frederick the Great was to shelter in his dominions. "They are the best priests I have ever known," said he. Catherine II. was to welcome them to her vast states and make use of them in founding educational establishments.

Voltaire triumphed. "Ferney was the European court," says Chateaubriand again in his *Analyse raisonnée de l'Histoire de France;* "this universal homage rendered to the genius who was sapping by redoubled blows the foundations of society as it then existed, is characteristic of the approaching transformation of that society. And nevertheless it is true

that if Louis XV. had caressed ever so slightly the flatterer of Madame de Pompadour, if he had treated him as Louis XIV. treated Racine, Voltaire would have abdicated the sceptre, he would have bartered his power against a distinction of the antechamber, just as Cromwell was momentarily ready to exchange the place he now holds in history for the garter of Alix of Salisbury; these are mysteries of human vanity."

Madame de Pompadour had sought the eulogies of Voltaire; she obtained them. From the moment when she persecuted the Jesuits she had a right to his approbation. When she dies, the patriarch of Ferney will be almost affected. He will write to Damilaville: "Consider, dear brother, that true men of letters, true philosophers, should regret Madame de Pompadour. She thought as she ought to; no one knows that better than I. Truly, we have sustained a great loss." And to Cardinal de Bernis: "I think, Monseigneur, that Madame de Pompadour was sincerely your friend, and if it be permitted me to go further, I think from the depths of my rustic retreat that the King experiences a great privation. He was loved for himself by a soul born sincere, who had justness in the mind and justice in the heart." Voltaire is always the same. What he lacks is not simply religious faith, but the moral sense.

While the foundations of the monarchy were cracking on every side, the patriarch of Ferney, that ancient courtier of noble lords and sovereigns, was

trembling with joy and pride. "All that I see," he wrote to M. de Chauvelin, April 2, 1762, "is sowing the seeds of a revolution which will infallibly arrive, but which I shall not have the pleasure of witnessing. The light is spreading so from place to place, that it will burst out on the first occasion, and then there will be a fine row. The young men are very lucky; they will see many things!" Madman, who regretted not being destined to see the scaffolds of '93!

Madame de Pompadour also felt that the political, social, and religious edifice would crumble within a few years. But why concern one's self about the future? Why be saddened by dismal thoughts and gloomy presentiments? What the haughty favorite desired was the ability to retain to her last day, her last hour, her sceptre as queen of the left hand. The rest troubled her little. It was not Louis XV., it was she who said: "After me the deluge!"

XII

THE DEATH OF THE MARQUISE DE POMPADOUR

IT is a law of Providence that no one can shine without suffering, and that jealous Fortune avenges herself for all the successes that she grants. Women are like conquerors: they always expiate their triumphs. For these queens *à la mode*, these dazzling magicians who appear like meteors and who live amid a cloud of incense, there is after all no alternative but death or dethronement. To die or to grow old, that is the terrible dilemma from which they are unable to extricate themselves. Women whose attractions have not been more than ordinary bend to this common law with sufficient resignation. But the celebrated beauty, the haughty beauty who delights in herself as if her youth were never to end, secretly revolts against cruel destiny and silently endures a real martyrdom. Her shrivelled hand tries to retain the sceptre that is slipping from it. She is unwilling to descend from the throne whence she has been used to survey a crowd of servile adorers. As the changes come on gradually, in a manner hardly perceptible, she has proba-

bly failed to notice the precursory symptoms of her decline. She is told on all sides that she is more seductive, more radiant, than ever. Then, in this last blossoming of her departing youth, she experiences that indefinable sentiment, that blending of unquiet joy and voluptuous melancholy, which takes possession of the soul under the light of the last bright days of autumn. When one looks at the azure sky, one cannot realize that winter is so near. But if one drops one's eyes, the yellowing leaves that cover the ground or are swept away by the wind, remind one that the feast of nature is drawing to a close. The woman who longs most to preserve her illusions concerning the perpetuity of her youth, finds warning accusations which afflict and terrify her. The first wrinkles, the first gray hairs; the color which needs to be touched up, the lips and eyes which call imperiously for paint; the insolent mirror which nevertheless one cannot break because it is in opposition to the flatterers, because in its mute language it brutally declares the truth!

Madame de Pompadour was forty-two years old. Aged prematurely by the unwholesome emotions of intrigue, vanity, and ambition, she was suffering both in body and in mind. Incessant palpitation of the heart disturbed her. Fever was her constant guest. On nearing the end of her career she looked back sadly over the road she had traversed, and comprehended at last the inanity of the things in which she had vainly sought for happiness. But for a

true repentance she lacked a religious faith like that of Mademoiselle de La Vallière. In default of faith, the Marquise had great courage. She strove energetically against disease, but she remained worldly and theatrical even in suffering and death. "She would no longer appear in Paris," says M. Arsène Houssaye; "at court she never showed herself except by lamplight, in the apparel of a queen of Golconda, crowned with diamonds, wearing twenty bracelets, and dragging after her an Indian robe embroidered with gold and silver. It was always the divine Marquise of other days; but presently, when one looked closely, one discovered that it was but a pastel, still charming, but rubbed out here and there. It was at the mouth that her beauty began to fade. She had early contracted the habit of biting her lips, to conceal her emotions. By the time she was thirty, her mouth had lost all its vivid freshness. It was necessary to repaint it after every meal and every kiss!"[1] Her eyes had retained all their brilliancy. But the rest of her person was plainly aging. She tried in vain to conceal her excessive meagreness under the skilful devices of the toilette. She was a woman stricken by death. She fell ill at Choisy, and while there was still time she asked to be taken back to Versailles in order to die as she had lived, amidst the evidences

[1] See the witty and interesting work by M. Arsène Houssaye: *Louis XV.* 1 vol., Dentu.

of her power. Her friends had an instant of hope, for a slight amelioration was produced. The poet Favart instantly produced this stanza: —

" Le soleil est malade,
Et Pompadour aussi;
Ce n'est qu'une passade,
L'un es l'autre est guéri;
Le bon Dieu, qui seconde
Nos vœux et notre amour,
Pour le bonheur du monde,
Nous a rendu le jour
Avec Pompadour." [1]

Palissot sent the following verses to the Marquise: —

" Vous êtes trop chère à la France,
Au dieu des arts et des amours,
Pour redouter du sort la fatale puissance.
Tous les dieux veillaient sur vos jours,
Tous étaient animés du zèle qui m'inspire;
En volant à votre secours
Ils ont affermi leur empire." [2]

[1] The sun is sick,
And so is Pompadour;
'Tis but a transient thing,
For both are cured;
The good God who aids
Our wishes and our love,
For the welfare of the world
Restores to us the day
With Pompadour.

[2] You are too dear to France,
To the god of arts and loves,
To fear the deadly power of fate.
All the gods watched over your life,
All were animated by the zeal that inspires me;
In flying to your rescue
They have established their empire.

Madame de Pompadour did not allow herself to be deceived by these fallacious hyperboles. All this mythology did not mislead her. She understood very well that there was nothing in common between her and the sun, and felt herself already invaded by the chilly shadows of death.

"It will come at the predestined day; it will come," as Bossuet said, "this last illness when, amidst an infinite number of friends, doctors, and attendants, you will find yourself without assistance, more forsaken, more abandoned, than the pauper dying on the straw without a sheet for his burial! For of what avail are these friends in this fatal malady? Only to afflict you by their presence; these doctors? only to torment you; these attendants? only to run hither and thither about your house with useless zeal. You need other friends, other servants; these paupers whom you have despised are the only ones capable of assisting you. Why did you not think in time of providing yourself with such friends as would now hold out their arms to receive you into everlasting tabernacles?"[1]

Even on her death-bed Madame de Pompadour, always the slave of the man whose mistress she was called, feared the King more than God himself. They say she sent to Louis XV. to ask if he desired her to go to confession. The King replied affirmatively. A priest from Paris, the curé of the Made-

[1] Bossuet. Sermon on Final Impenitence.

leine, administered the last sacraments to the dying woman. When he was about to withdraw, it is pretended that she retained him with a last smile, and said: "One moment, Monsieur the Curé, we will go away together." A few minutes before she had caused her will to be read to her, which commenced thus: "I, Jeanne Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour, wife separated from the property of Charles Guillaume Lenormand d'Étioles, equerry, have made and written my present testament and ordinance of my last will, which I wish to be executed in its entirety. I recommend my soul to God, entreating Him to have pity on it, to pardon my sins, to grant me the grace to do penance and to die in dispositions worthy of His mercy, hoping to appease His justice by the merits of the precious blood of Jesus Christ my Saviour and by the powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin and of all the Saints in Paradise. I desire that my body shall be taken to the Capuchins of the Place Vendôme, at Paris, and buried in the vault of the chapel conceded to me." As one sees, the Marquise was not so faithless as the Encyclopedists claimed. The poor woman had learned for herself what earthly kings are. Perhaps, at the last hour, she turned her eyes toward the King of Heaven.

She breathed her last April 15, 1764. It was long since Louis XV. had ceased to love her. He merely tolerated her. If he had kept her at court, it was only lest her disgrace should make her die of chagrin.

This premature death was rather a release from embarrassment than an affliction to him. It is said that, seeing from one of the windows of Versailles the carriage starting which was to carry her coffin to Paris during a frightful storm, he said tranquilly: "The Marquise will not have good weather for her journey." Then, calmly drawing out his watch, he calculated at what hour the funeral would reach its destination — and that was all.

Madame de Pompadour's existence had been like a parody of real greatness. It was the same with her obsequies. A Capuchin had been appointed to make the funeral oration. He extricated himself from this heavy task like a man of wit. "I receive," said he, "the body of the very high and powerful lady, the Marquise de Pompadour, lady of the Queen's palace. She was at the school of all virtues, for Her Majesty is a model of goodness, of modesty, of indulgence." And thus he went on for a quarter of an hour, making a well-deserved eulogy of the Queen. Marie Leczinska, always so charitable, was struck by the extreme promptness with which the too celebrated favorite was forgotten. "No one has anything more to say here of her who is no more," she remarked to President Hénault, "than if she had never existed. Such is the world; truly it is worth while to love it!"

Once dead, Madame de Pompadour seemed unworthy even of hatred. Still, the men of letters and the artists who had formerly been protected by her,

regretted her somewhat. Voltaire, while remembering with bitterness that she had sustained Crébillon, wrote to M. de Cideville: "I have been much afflicted by the death of Madame de Pompadour. It is ridiculous that an old scribbler on paper, who can scarcely walk, should be still living, and that a beautiful woman should die at forty in the midst of the finest career in the world. Perhaps if she had tasted the repose that I enjoy she would be living still." Diderot was more severe. He had to give a description of the Salon of 1765, where a picture was exhibited which Vanloo had painted during Madame de Pompadour's illness, and which represented the afflicted Arts addressing themselves to Destiny to obtain the preservation of her life. "Vanloo's suppliants," said the critic, "obtain nothing from Destiny which is more favorable to France than to the Arts. Madame de Pompadour died at a moment when she was thought to be out of danger. Well! what remains of this woman who exhausted us of men and money, deprived us of honor and energy, and upset the political system of Europe? The treaty of Versailles, which will last as long as it can; Bouchardon's Amour, which will always be admired; several stones sculptured by Guay, which will astonish future antiquaries; a good little picture by Vanloo, which will be looked at sometimes; and a pinch of dust."

XIII

THE OLD AGE OF MARIE LECZINSKA

WHEN the eyes have been fatigued by the glow of artificial lights, they willingly repose on soft and real daylight. After the haughty favorite, one likes to contemplate the good Queen. Comparisons made between the mistress and the legitimate wife are always to the advantage of the second. To one the agitations of a troubled conscience, to the other peace of heart; to one contempt, to the other respect; scandal to one, edification to the other. The Memoirs of the Duke de Luynes and of President Hénault make us acquainted with the qualities of Marie Leczinska, just as those of Madame du Hausset lay bare the moral plague spots of the Marquise de Pompadour. A solitary conclusion may be drawn from reading all of them; namely, that the Queen, neglected as she was, and in spite of the hidden rôle which contented her modesty, was, notwithstanding, less unhappy than the all-powerful favorite, who disposed of the monarchy as if it were a pension list. Each of them had her chagrins, but God gives us strength to endure the ills He sends us,

while those we create for ourselves are intolerable. The heaviest chains are those we forge with our own hands. The list of suicides is a proof in support of this observation. Is there, for example, an affliction more profound than that of a mother who loses her child? Very well! you never hear that a woman has taken her life because she has had a grief like that. On the other hand, how many suicides there are among the victims of pride and sensuality! Religion alleviates the sorrows which are in the nature and order of things. But griefs which are in revolt against Providence, afflictions voluntarily created by criminal caprices, or insensate ambitions, have in them something inconsolable and incurable. Madame de Pompadour vainly sought an asylum for her soul.

The Queen found at the foot of altars such a strength that after kneeling before the image of our Saviour Jesus Christ, she could, on rising, drink the cup of bitterness without its leaving a trace upon her lips.

While the guilty mistress beheld with such spite and vexation the departure of her youth, the virtuous wife experienced neither pain nor regret at growing old. It is the privilege of honest women to accept the laws of our common destiny without a murmur, and not to attempt a foolish struggle against nature in the hope of repairing the irreparable ravages of years. The Marquise loaded her face, withered by anxieties, with rouge and powder, and exhausted all the science of a desperate coquetry in

the effort to keep up an illusion. Marie Leczinska, on the contrary, did not entertain for a moment the thought of rejuvenating herself. Casanova, who was present at one of her dinners at Fontainebleau, represents her as "without rouge, simply dressed, her head covered with a large cap, old-looking and devout in aspect." This wholly Christian simplicity was not without its charm. The Queen possessed not merely goodness but wit, and her qualities were reflected on her spiritual countenance without the least pettiness, venerable with no touch of moroseness. While Louis XV. and his mistresses were so sad, so disillusionized, so disenchanted with everything, though surrounded by all their voluptuous pleasures, Marie Leczinska never uttered a complaint. Gaiety was in reality the basis of her character, not that factitious, turbulent, ephemeral gaiety which vice knows for a moment, but that soft, continuous, unaffected, equable gaiety imparted by a serene disposition and a conscience in repose.

What an expression of soundness, of moral well-being! What patience with life, what sympathetic serenity! The Queen is interested in many things; she is fond of honest amusements. Unlike Louis XV., who is bored by everything, she has a taste for music; she paints a little, she embroiders, she plays the guitar, the hurdy-gurdy, the harpsichord; she willingly takes part in games of chance. President Hénault introduces us into the cabinet, whither she withdraws after having dined alone in public, in accordance with

the formalities of etiquette: "Here," he says, "we are in another climate; this is no longer the Queen, but a private person. Here one finds work of all descriptions, tapestry, arts of every sort, and while she is working she kindly tells us what she has been reading; she mentions the parts that have impressed her and appreciates them."

Look at Latour's pastel, so admirably described by Sainte-Beuve. "It is a half-length portrait of the Queen. She holds a closed fan in one hand; she turns toward the spectator like some one who is thinking, and who is going to say something arch, some innocent piece of slyness. Her hair is slightly powdered; on her head she wears a point of black lace, a sort of little fichu called a *fanchonnette;* a mantelet of pale blue silk, with puffings or ribbons of grayish white, the shades are so blended that they lose themselves in each other. A tranquil harmony pervades all the tones. The lips delicate, somewhat thin, turning up at the angles; the eye small and brilliant; the nose a trifle saucy, — everything in this countenance breathes gentleness, subtlety, archness. If you know neither her rank nor her name, you will say that this middle-aged person can certainly make a sound and appropriate repartee; that she has the grain of salt without bitterness."

How many times, at Versailles, I have stopped for a while in the Queen's bedchamber,[1] in that chamber

[1] Room No. 116 of the *Notice du Musée*, by M. Eudore Soulié.

which was occupied by Marie Leczinska from December 1, 1725, the day of her arrival at the palace of Louis XIV., until June 24, 1768, the day of her death! At the back of the former alcove, on the right, over a door which led to the small apartments of the Queen,[1] now hangs Nattier's fine portrait of Marie Leczinska. The wife of Louis XV. is sitting down, dressed in a red gown bordered with fur, her arm leaning on a pier-table, on which lie the crown, the royal mantle, and a New Testament. There is nothing studied, nothing theatrical, in either the pose, the countenance, or the costume. It is a blending of kindliness and dignity. It is a queen, but a Christian queen.

After the pencil, the pen; after Nattier, Madame du Deffand. Listen to the famous Marquise, ordinarily so sarcastic: —

"Thémire has much wit, a sensitive heart, a kindly disposition, an interesting face. Her education has imprinted in her soul a piety so veritable that it has become a sentiment, and one which serves her to regulate all others. Thémire loves God, and next to him all that is lovable; she knows how to bring solid matters and agreeable ones into harmony. She occupies herself with each in turn, and sometimes combines them. Her virtues have, so to say, the germ and pungency of passions. To admirable purity of manners she joins extreme sensibility; to

[1] No. 122 of the *Notice*.

the greatest modesty a desire to please which would by itself achieve its object. Her discernment makes her penetrate all caprices and understand all follies; her goodness and charity make her endure them without impatience, and rarely permit her to laugh at them. . . . The respect she inspires is based rather on her virtues than her dignity. One has entire freedom of mind when with her; one owes it to the penetration and delicacy of hers. She understands so promptly and so subtly that it is easy to communicate to her whatever ideas one desires, without infringing the circumspection demanded by her rank. One forgets, on seeing Thémire, that there can be other grandeurs, other elevations, than those of her sentiments; one almost yields to the illusion that there is no interval between her and us than that of the superiority of her merits; but a fatal awakening acquaints us that this Thémire, so perfect, so amiable, is the Queen."

No one was a more faithful friend than Marie Leczinska. The little circle amidst which she lived displayed as much affection as respect for her. After supper she went almost every evening to the apartment of the Duchess de Luynes, her lady of honor. There she met, besides the Duke and Duchess, Cardinal de Luynes, the Duke and Duchess de Chevreuse, and President Hénault. This was a time of recreation and pleasant talk. The learned president shone there by his wit. One day he offered the Queen the manuscript of his *Abrégé chronologique*. She re-

turned it with the following words: "I think that M. Hénault, who says so many things in so few words, can hardly like the language of women who talk so much to say so little." In lieu of signature, she had written: *Devinez qui* (Guess who). The gallant author replied at once: —

"Ces mots tracés par une main divine
Ne peuvent me causer que trouble et qu'embarras.
C'est trop oser si mon cœur les devine;
C'est être ingrat que ne deviner pas."[1]

Another time, Fontenelle, then ninety-two years old, had addressed these verses to the President: —

"Il fallait n'être vieux qu'à Sparte,
Disent les anciens écrits.
Grand Dieu! combien je m'en écarte,
Moi qui suis si vieux dans Paris.
O Sparte! ô Sparte! hélas! qu'êtes-vous devenue?
Vous saviez tout le prix d'une tête chenue.

"Plus dans la canicule on était bien fourré,
Plus l'oreille était dure et l'œil mal éclairé,
Plus on déraisonnait dans sa triste famille,
Plus on épiloguait sur la moindre vétille,
Plus on avait de goutte et d'autre béatille,
Plus on avait perdu de dents de leur bon gré,
Plus on marchait courbé sur sa grosse béquille,
Plus on était, enfin, digne d'être enterré,
Et plus dans ses remparts on était honoré.

[1] These lines, traced by a hand divine,
Cannot but cause me trouble and embarrassment.
'Twere too much daring should my heart divine them;
'Twere too ungrateful not to guess them.

"O Sparte! ô Sparte! hélas! qu'êtes-vous devenue?
Vous saviez tout le prix d'une tête chenue."[1]

After reading these verses, the Queen wrote to President Hénault: "Say to Fontenelle that a head like his ought to find Sparta everywhere." The old man, very much flattered, responded by the following quatrain: —

"Les ans accumulés me poussent trop à bout.
Je ne puis plus, hélas! trouver Sparte partout,
Mais vous, le modèle des reines,
Vous devez bien trouver partout Athènes."[2]

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[1] One should not be old except in Sparta,
Say the ancient writings.
Great God! how far I am out of the way,
Who am so old in Paris.
O Sparta! O Sparta! alas! what has become of you?
You knew the full value of a hoary head.

The more one muffled up in dog-days,
The more the ear was deaf and dim the eye,
The more nonsense one talked in his sad family,
The more one criticised the veriest trifle,
The more gout and similar titbits one possessed,
The more teeth one had lost by their good will,
The more one stooped over his heavy crutch,
The more fit, in fact, one was to be buried,
The more within its ramparts one was honored.

O Sparta! O Sparta! alas! what has become of you?
You knew the full value of a hoary head.

[2] Accumulated years have pushed me to extremity.
I cannot longer, alas! find Sparta everywhere,
But you, the model of queens,
Assuredly should find Athens everywhere.

The kindly, affectionate character of Marie Leczinska is fully displayed in the simple and friendly letters she addressed to the Duchess of Luynes, her lady of honor. We cite several of them taken at hazard: —

"December 22, 1750. — Nothing could give me a greater pleasure than your letter, if I did not expect one still more sensible in four weeks, that of seeing you. Nevertheless, it is true, that to give me news of yourself sometimes, if you can do so without injuring yourself, would help to alleviate a time which already seems very long to me. All I ask of you is not to be thankful for my friendship; it is wholly due to you. Your letter affected me to tears. Yes, God will preserve you as long as I live; I ask it of Him with all my heart. When I write to M. de Luynes, I say: 'I embrace Madame de Luynes,' but since it is to you for him, I think it more honest to beg you to take the trouble for me. And Monseigneur, what would he like? I think it would be better to enclose all in the benediction I ask for him."

The Duke de Luynes had once sent the Queen a casket as a New-Year's gift. Marie Leczinska thanked him in the following note, dated January 1, 1751: "It is useless to say the casket is charming, new in style, in a word, nothing so pretty in the world; one knows all that. But what one doesn't know is that I am like a child with a plaything that pleases it. It pleases me with the same candor,

except that the gratitude proceeds from a person who knows the world a little, and even at her own expense, and whom God has granted the grace of having amiable and estimable friends wholly corrupt though she is."

Among other things the casket contained a pair of spectacles of which the good Queen's eyes stood in need. "Here I am gay for the whole day from Madame de Luynes' good-night," she wrote to the Duke, January 2, 1751. "Do you know what I was doing when I received Monseigneur's letter? I was with . . . guess who? . . . my fine new spectacles (*les beaux yeux de ma cassette*). Never did *l'Avare* love his own so much. I am hurrying to get to High Mass. I embrace Madame de Luynes, I bow before Monseigneur, and I wish you good-day."

The Duchess's shortest absences seemed like an eternity to Marie Leczinska. At such times she wrote letter on letter to her lady of honor, saying that long correspondences are the delights of friendship. Here is a letter which shows what a tender friend the Queen was. On receiving this heartfelt epistle, the Duchess de Luynes must have been profoundly affected: —

"January 23, 1751. — Do you know what pleasure I gave myself last evening? I went to surprise M. de Luynes in his apartment; I found him just as he had finished his supper with Monseigneur (the Bishop of Bayeux), in his pretty little room. I can-not tell you what joy I felt in seeing your apartment

again; I rested there a moment in order to preserve it, for, not finding you there yet, I began to be afraid of what might succeed it. Pleasures which are only imaginary need to be taken care of. I impatiently await the real ones."

To great goodness Marie Leczinska joined solid information. She knew six languages, — Polish, French, Italian, German, Swedish, Latin. Men of letters were struck by the shrewdness of her judgments on the things of the mind. Several of her maxims have been preserved, which attest a lofty soul and a profound knowledge of the human heart. Here are some of them: "We ought not to reflect more on the faults of others than will suffice to preserve ourselves from them. — Human wisdom teaches us to conceal our pride; religion alone destroys it. — To live peaceably in society, we must open our eyes to the qualities which please us, and shut them on the follies and caprices which shock us. — The women who pique themselves most on knowing what it is allowable for them to be ignorant of are those who care least about instructing themselves concerning what it is shameful not to know. — Many princes having regretted, when dying, that they had made war, we never see any who repented of having loved peace. — Good kings are slaves, and their people are free. — The only thing which can make amends for the slavery of the throne is the pleasure of doing some good. — In politics, as in morals, the shortest way to make men happy is to endeavor to make them virtuous."

The sovereign who expressed such thoughts as these was not an ordinary woman. She surpasses all the favorites of her husband, not merely in heart and virtue, but also in intelligence, knowledge, and wit.

XIV

MARIE LECZINSKA AND HER DAUGHTERS

MARIE LECZINSKA was a tender mother. She surrounded her daughters and her son with the most devoted cares, and knew how to inspire them with Christian sentiments. M. Michelet, who, in his latest works, tried to sully whatever he touched, has tried in vain to cast odious ridicule on the daughters of Louis XV. In spite of his venomous insinuations, his calumnious influence, he has been unable to extinguish the aureole of purity surrounding the brows of these virtuous princesses. The truth may be found in the excellent work of M. Édouard de Barthélemy, an impartial judge, a critic full of sagacity.[1] A curious book, recently published by M. Honoré Bonhomme,[2] has also avenged the memory of the daughters of Louis XV. against attacks which the most bitter adversaries of the mon-

[1] *Mesdames de France, filles de Louis XV.*, by Édouard de Barthélemy. Didier.

[2] *Louis XV. et sa famille*, after unpublished letters and documents, by Honoré Bonhomme. 1 Vol., Dentu.

archy and the most violent of pamphleteers had not permitted themselves.

All of the daughters of the King, with the exception of Madame Adelaide, spent their childhood at the Abbey of Fontevrault. Cardinal Fleury thought the presence of the little princesses at Versailles entailed too much expense, and Louis XV., yielding to the suggestions of his parsimonious minister, regretfully determined on separating himself from his children. Adelaide alone, by dint of prayers and supplications, was able to escape the abbey. On returning from Mass, she threw herself at her father's feet, and, although only seven years old, succeeded in gaining her cause. The King wept a little, says Barbier, and promised her that she should not go away.

It is easy to comprehend how much the good Queen must have suffered from this parting with her daughters. She wrote to the Duchess de Luynes, October 12, 1747: "The King surprised me by showing me the portraits of my daughters from Fontevrault. I did not know they had been painted. The two eldest are really beautiful, but I have never seen anything so agreeable as the little one. She has an affecting expression, very remote from sadness. I have never seen anything so singular; she is touching, sweet, spiritual. If you find my letter too long, make allowances for the tenderness of a mother and the confidence of a friend."

The six daughters of Louis XV. were born: the

twins, Elisabeth and Henriette in 1727; Adelaide in 1732; Victoire in 1733; Sophie in 1734; Louise, the future Carmelite, in 1737.

The three princesses of whom the Queen speaks in the letter we have just quoted, and who were still at Foutevrault, were Victoire, Sophie, and Louise. The twins, Elisabeth and Henriette, had quitted the convent in 1739, and the former had soon afterwards married the Infant Don Philip, son of Philip V., King of Spain. Thereafter she is designated as Madame Infanta. The six sisters were all spoken of as Mesdames de France. Nevertheless, there was but one of them who married. When she took her departure for Spain, at the age of twelve years (August 31, 1739), the twin sisters exchanged heartrending farewells. They could not resign themselves to separation. "'Tis forever!" they cried, their voices broken by sobs. Louis XV. accompanied his daughter as far as Plessis-Picquet. The Duke de Luynes relates that while on the road he gave his dear child most pathetic advice concerning the conduct she should observe in her new country, where, said he, her mild temper would infallibly win all hearts. He spoke to her with so much affection and tenderness that all who were in the carriage were melted to tears.

In 1748, the husband of Madame Infanta obtained the sovereignty of Parma, Piacenza, and Guastalla. Before going to their new dominions with her husband, the daughter of Louis XV. came to see her

parents at Versailles. This was a delightful moment for the royal family. Princes and princesses made few journeys in the eighteenth century. What joy to embrace a father, mother, brother, sisters, who had never expected to see one again! Marie Leczinska returned thanks to heaven. The little girl of twelve, who had left Versailles, returned thither a young woman in all the brilliancy of her twenty-second year. The Dauphin was beside himself with joy. In the first moment he embraced every one he saw, even the lady's maids (December, 1748). Sophie and Louise were still at the convent of Fontevrault, but Henriette, Adelaide, and Victoire were at Versailles. Their sister's arrival was an extreme happiness for them. Madame Infanta, so delighted to be once more with her family, had not courage to leave them. Months passed without her being able to decide on quitting Versailles, where her filial and sisterly heart experienced emotions so sweet. Nevertheless, it was necessary to be resigned. The dreaded moment arrived in October, 1749. The farewells must be spoken. It cost Henriette so much to part with her beloved sister that she fainted several times. The Dauphin was in tears, and Louis XV., who loved his daughters most profoundly, showed by his grief all the strength of his paternal tenderness.

Madame Infanta returned to Versailles some years later, but at that time the joy of her return was not untroubled. The Princess no longer found her twin sister, that dear Henriette whom she regarded, so to say, as the half of her soul.

Henriette had just died at the age of twenty-four (February 10, 1752). This young girl, as unhappy as sympathetic, was certainly one of the most touching figures in the feminine gallery of Versailles. M. Honoré Bonhomme has made an exquisite portrait of her, from both the physical and the moral point of view: "Of a sickly constitution, Madame Henriette had that ivory whiteness of complexion peculiar to the daughters of the North, and which her mother, Polish in blood and race, seemed to have transmitted to her along with life. Delicate, tall, and slender, there was something dreamy and inspired in her person. Her mild, pure features, aristocratic in their outline, charmed and yet inspired respect; her smile was melancholy, and her whole appearance, in which gloom seemed constantly warring against brightness, bore the impress of fatality. It was because she carried in her heart the secret of her destiny. Like pale Ophelia, she was to die while gathering flowers, and like Myrto, the young Tarentine of André Chenier, she was never to cross the threshold of the spouse. For the rest, inwardly animated by the sacred fire, enamored of great things, she possessed all subtleties of the mind as well as all delicacies of the heart. Looking into her great, dreamy eyes, which seemed to reflect the dormant limpidity of deep lakes, one divined what abysses of tenderness and devotion were hidden underneath, and felt a presentiment that her first love would also be her last, that she would die there where her soul had fixed itself."

That, in fact, is what happened. Madame Henriette had conceived for the young Duke de Chartres, son of the Duke d'Orléans, an affection which was returned. The Marquis d'Argenson wrote, November 30, 1739: "A secret effort is being made to bring about a marriage between the Duke de Chartres and Madame *seconde* [so Madame Henriette was called; her twin sister, Madame Infanta, was known as Madame *première*], and it is believed that the King is determined on it and gradually working toward it. Nothing could be more conformable to pacificatory views, for Europe would plainly see from this that the King was disposed to substitute the Orleans branch to the Dauphin, rather than the Spanish one."

To understand this phrase, it is necessary to recall that the Dauphin was not yet married, and that people often wondered what would happen if this only son of Louis XV. should die without male posterity. Many thought that in such a case the King, in spite of the renunciations of the treaty of Utrecht, would take his heir from the Spanish Bourbons, and not from the Orleans branch. D'Argenson was in favor of the latter branch. Cardinal Fleury, on the contrary, pursued it with hostility, as if he had an insight of the future. The old minister prevailed so far, that the King, who had nevertheless a real liking for the Duke de Chartres, an amiable and estimable young prince, would not give his consent to the projected marriage. One day the Duke was riding

beside the King. "Sire," said he, "I had a great hope. Your Majesty had not taken it from my father. . . . I could have contributed to the happiness of Madame Henriette, who would have remained in France with Your Majesty. May I still be allowed to hope?" The King inclined toward the Prince and sadly pressed his hand. This beautiful dream of love, so quickly faded, must be renounced. Three years later, the Duke de Chartres espoused the daughter of the Prince de Bourbon-Conté. Madame Henriette had the courage to conceal her immense sorrow. She was present, death in her soul, a smile on her lips, at the marriage of the man she loved (December 9, 1743). From that day she felt herself heart-stricken, and her last days were merely an immolation. Prince Nattier has represented the Princess under the double emblems of *Fire* and *Meditation.* She is leaning against a tripod on which half-consumed torches are smoking. These torches are like the image of the nearly extinguished flame of the Prince to whom the young girl would willingly have given her faith. She never uttered a complaint, a murmur. Calm, grave, recollected, she meditated and she prayed. The stay of her twin sister at Versailles was like a break in the darkness of her night. But when this dear companion of her infancy departed, all the wounds of her tender and loyal heart reopened.

The arrival of her three younger sisters, Victoire, Sophie, and Louise, who left the convent of Fonte-

vrault at the close of the year 1750, did not console her. Having sacrificed her own happiness, she desired that at least the Duke de Chartres might be happy. But it was not so. The Duke had married a woman whose conduct was said to be anything but exemplary. He could not, then, forget that tender, that virtuous Henriette who seemed to him the image of sadness. The Princess wept silently in her oratory, and offered her sufferings to God. Earth was not worthy of her.

There are characters which can only expand in a better world. Sorrow had undermined the constitution of Madame Henriette. She died February 10, 1752. "Ah! my sister! my dear sister!" were her last words. She died as she had lived: while loving. "Sad sport of fate," says M. Honoré Bonhomme, "poor saintly girl, virgin and martyr, who spent nine whole years in climbing, step after step, the Calvary where she yielded up her soul."

After relating this death, the Duke de Luynes adds: "No one can express the sadness into which the King is plunged. The Queen is much afflicted, and also the Dauphin, Madame the Dauphiness, and Mesdames. Madame Adélaide does not weep, but silent griefs are usually the longest. Madame Henriette was much beloved. Her mild character, without ill temper and even without will, rendered her extremely complaisant toward the Dauphin, the Dauphiness, and the ladies, her sisters."

On receiving tidings of this mournful death, Mad-

ame Infanta wrote her father a most touching letter. She said she wished to come and mingle her tears with those of her family. She arrived in France in September, 1752, and remained with her father for a year.

Madame Infanta was not happy. She did not greatly esteem her husband, and that Prince cut a rather sorry figure in the little sovereignty of Parma and Piacenza. He had neither money nor prestige; and his wife, who was very intelligent, his wife, of whom Bernis said that she would make a good minister of foreign affairs, was constantly dreaming of some more considerable establishment for him. She thought by turns of exchanging the Duchy of Parma for Tuscany, or acquisitions in Flanders, Lorraine, or even Corsica. She fancied that, thanks to her father's affection and the territorial changes in Europe, she would end by obtaining something. The Marquis d'Argenson, who had not much sympathy for her, wrote, September 27, 1753: "It is to be hoped she will never come back to France. Is it just that the State should suffer because she was married so badly? Along with her go a great quantity of chariots loaded with all sorts of things that the King has given her."

Madame Infanta returned to France a third time, but only to die there. She arrived at the château of Choisy, September 3, 1757. To credit M. Michelet, it was she alone who brought about the Seven Years' War. But there is no foundation for this assertion

of the great writer who, toward the close of his life, created what one might call the school of imaginative history. At the time when she reappeared at court, Madame Infanta was glowing with freshness, brilliancy, and health. No one could have foreseen that her death was so near at hand. One of her last letters was addressed to her son Ferdinand, whom she had left at Parma. It commenced as follows: —

"Life is uncertain, my son, and my character is too sincere for me either to vaunt or even to affect perfect indifference as to the length of mine; but I feel that the wish to see you, to leave you worthy of the name you bear in the world, such, in fine, as I desire you, is one of the ties that attach me most to life, and one of the reasons, perhaps, which will most abridge mine by the continual torments caused me by this desire and the fear of not obtaining it. It will be a great consolation to be able to leave you an avowal of my sentiments if I die before you are in a condition to read it. If I live, it will serve me as a plan whereon to form you; and in either case, it will always be to you a proof of my tenderness and of my care for your welfare at an age when many people do not yet think of it."

Not many days after writing this letter, Madame Infanta was attacked by small-pox, and died December 6, 1759. The twins, who had loved each other so tenderly, both died prematurely. Madame Henriette had died at the age of twenty-four, Madame Infanta at thirty-two. She was buried at Saint

Denis, close to her sister, so that their union lasted even in the tomb.

Marie Leczinska's heart was broken with grief. But instead of murmuring against Providence, she bent filially beneath the hand of God who smote her. Her five remaining children, the Dauphin, Adelaide, Victoire, Sophie, and Louise, showed her a profound affection. Never was a mother better loved. Louis XV. took pleasure in the society of his daughters. As a father, he had that sort of citizenlike good-nature which is unhappily rare among princes. Mesdames lodged underneath their father, in the former apartment of Madame de Montespan. Madame Adelaide occupied a chamber which communicated by a private staircase with that of her father. "Often," relates Madame Campan in her Memoirs, "he brought and drank coffee there which he had made himself. Madame Adelaide pulled a bell-rope, which announced the King's visit to Madame Victoire. On rising to go to her sister, Madame Victoire rang for Madame Sophie, who in her turn rang for Madame Louise."

In a twinkling the four sisters were gathered around their father. At six in the evening, at the unbooting of the King after the chase, as people said in those days, the princesses came to pay a visit to Louis XV., but this time with a certain etiquette. "The princesses," says Madame Campan again, "put on an enormous hoop which supported a skirt braided with gold and embroideries. They fastened

a long train to their waist, and hid the negligence of the rest of their habiliments by a large cape of black taffeta, which covered them up to the chin. Knights of honor, ladies, pages, equerries, ushers, carrying large torches, accompanied them to the King. In an instant the whole palace, usually solitary, was in movement; the King kissed each princess on her forehead." In reality, he found more true happiness in the virtuous intimacy of his daughters than in the circle of his courtiers and the arms of his favorites. There were moments when people believed that in growing old the debauchee would become wise. "The King," wrote D'Argenson, "seems to wish for no society but that of his family, like a patriarch and a good man."

Marie Leczinska felt thankful to her husband for the affection he had for his daughters. The relations of Mesdames with their mother were full of confidence, sweetness, and gaiety. They liked to enter those little apartments of the Queen, where Marie Leczinska forgot the splendor of the throne to live modestly as a good mother. The little apartments[1] comprised three rooms: a salon, a bathroom, and a studio for painting. Madame the Countess d'Armaillé, whose graceful and solid work we have so often had occasion to quote, has given a charming description of these three rooms in which Marie Leczinska spent the greater portion of her time. "Is it

[1] No. 122 of *Notice du Musée de Versailles*, by M. Eudore Soulié.

not true," she says, "that one may divine the character and tastes of a woman by merely inspecting the sanctuary of her private life, or, to speak more simply, that place in the dwelling where she habitually prefers to stay? It matters little whether this room be a garret or a drawing-room. Nothing is so intimate as certain interior arrangements; nothing tells the story of a woman better than the way in which she orders the room she inhabits. In the little apartments of the Queen one found everything which makes the charm of a peaceful existence. Here, pieces of work begun for the poor, or for churches, a whole piece of furniture embroidered by her hand; there, an open harpsichord with Moncrif's cantatas, Rameau's operettas, Polish hymns; further away a drawing-table, a spinning-wheel provided with its distaff, frames for embroidering and weaving, a small printing-press; then flowers, paintings, portraits of children, miniatures. On a console, a vase offered by Marshal de Nangis, a manuscript given by Cardinal de Fleury, a porcelain pagoda with verses by Madame de Boufflers; in an embrasure of the window a cabinet containing the Queen's favorite books, with some verses by the Duchess de Luynes; everywhere souvenirs of friendship, of maternal tenderness, of useful or agreeable occupations." It was there that, surrounded by her children, the virtuous Queen tasted the joys of the heart, those joys imparted only by a good conscience, and which the mistresses for whom Louis XV. deserted her had never known.

XV

THE DAUPHINESS MARIE JOSÈPHE OF SAXONY

MARIE LECZINSKA was not less happy in her son than in her daughters. The bad examples of the court had not spoiled the upright and honest nature of the Dauphin. As is said by Baron de Gleichen in his Memoirs, the piety of the young prince was enlightened, and his policy foresaw the dangers of irreligion. As son and father, as brother and husband, he never ceased to display the qualities of a good and virtuous heart. He had deeply mourned his first wife, that sympathetic Spanish Infanta, who died in 1746, when hardly twenty years old. Reasons of State demanded that, in spite of his great sorrow, he should promptly contract a second marriage.

Louis XV. selected for his son a princess of the house of Saxony, after Austria and Prussia the most powerful of the Empire. He intended thus to consolidate his German alliances. Marshal Saxe, natural son of Augustus II., King of Saxony, Elector of Poland, and of the beautiful Countess Aurora of Königsmark, was the principal agent of the negotia-

tion which was to form a pact of union between his new country and his old one. A learned Saxon diplomatist, now in the service of Austria, Count Vitzthum, published some years ago an excellent work, based on unpublished documents and letters in the archives of Dresden, on the Marshal and the princess who espoused the Dauphin.

Marie Josèphe of Saxony, daughter of Augustus III., was at this time fifteen years old. She was an agreeable young person, with large blue eyes that were at once keen and gentle. Her countenance was intelligent, her character excellent, her education complete. Marshal Saxe wrote to his brother, Augustus III.: "Sire, what shall I say to you? I find this affair advantageous at all points for your family, and I shall descend without regret to the empire of the shades after I have seen it terminated; I shall have accomplished my career. I have enjoyed the delights of this world; glory has covered me with its benefits; nothing more remained to me but to be useful to you, and all my destiny will have been fulfilled in a most satisfactory manner."

Marshal Saxe wrote to the wife of Augustus III., mother of the future Dauphiness: —

"Madame, the Most Christian King sent me word yesterday, that he had requested Your Majesty for the hand of the Princess Marie Josèphe for Monseigneur the Dauphin. I flatter myself that this proposition will not displease either the Princess or Your Majesty, for, in truth, Monseigneur the Dauphin is

a very good match, and I should like to live long enough to see our divine Princess Queen of France. I think that would suit her very well. She has always been my inclination, and it is long since I destined her for the crown of France, which is a fine enough morsel, and the Prince who will some day wear it is fine also. The Princess Josèphe will have no reason to be bored while she is waiting for it. The kingly father-in-law is charming; he loves his children, and from the caresses he gave the late Dauphiness, I infer those which our Princess will have to endure. This is word for word what the King wrote me in a letter I received yesterday, written by his own hand from one end to the other. 'You will not be vexed with this marriage, my dear Marshal? Let your Princess be sure that it depends on her alone to make our happiness and the felicity of my people.'"

In the same letter the Marshal gave some very sensible and prudent counsels: "I will say another word to the Princess. To succeed here, neither hauteur nor familiarity is required; hauteur, however, pertaining to dignity, she can more easily incline to that side. The women of the court all have minds like diamonds, and are wicked withal. No one will fail in respect towards her, but they will try to entangle her in their continual quarrels, and at these she must do nothing but laugh and amuse herself. This is what the King does; and if anything displeases her, she must address herself directly to the King: he will

advise and conduct her very well. This confidence will please him. He is the only person at court with whom she should have no reserve. She should regard him as her refuge, her father, and tell him everything, good or bad, just as it happens, without disguising anything. With everybody else, reserve. If she does that, he will adore her."

The formal demand in marriage was made at Dresden, January 7, 1747, by two ambassadors, one extraordinary, the Duke de Richelieu, the other ordinary, the Marquis des Issart. Richelieu wrote to the Count de Loss, apropos of the future Dauphiness: "I find her really charming; nevertheless, she is not a beauty, but she has all the graces imaginable; a large nose, thick, fresh lips, the brightest and most intelligent eyes in the world, and, in fine, I assure that if there were any such at the Opera, they would soon be put up at auction. I do not say too much to you, but I do not say so much to others."

Marie Josèphe of Saxony left Dresden, January 14, 1747. She saw her betrothed for the first time between Nangis and Corbeil. The nuptial benediction was given to the pair in the chapel of Versailles, February 8, 1747. Four days afterward, Marshal Saxe wrote to Augustus III.: "Sire, I shall have no difficulty in saying agreeable things to Your Majesty about Madame the Dauphiness, and renown will serve as my guaranty. No one could succeed better than this Princess; she is adored by everybody, and the Queen loves her as if she were her own child;

the King is enchanted with her, and M. the Dauphin loves her passionately. She has steered her way through all this with all imaginable address; I could not but admire her. At fifteen, according to what they say, there is no such thing as childhood in this society; and, in truth, she has astonished me. Your Majesty could hardly believe with what nobility, what presence of mind, Madame the Dauphiness has conducted herself. M. the Dauphin seems a schoolboy beside her."

The married pair were installed on the ground floor, in the south wing of the central portion of the palace, under the Queen's apartments. (The Dauphin's bedroom, where the Regent died, is now the third hall of the Marshals, No. 46 of M. Eudore Soulié's *Notice du Musée.* That of the Dauphiness is now the second hall of the Marshals, No. 41 of the *Notice.*) It was in the latter chamber that, according to usage, the ceremonial of the putting to bed took place. In the letter we are about to quote, Marshal Saxe gives his brother an account of this strange custom: —

"Certainly," he says, "there are moments which call for all the assurance of a person formed to sustain his part with dignity. Among others there is one, that of the bed, whose curtains are opened when the husband and wife have been put into the nuptial bed, which is terrible, because the whole court is in the room; and the King told me to remain near Madame the Dauphiness in order to reassure her.

She endured this with a tranquillity which astonished me. The Dauphin drew the coverings over his face; but my Princess never stopped talking to me with a charming ease, paying no more attention to the people of the court than if there had been no one in the chamber. On approaching her, I said the King had ordered me to do so to keep her in countenance, and that all this would only last a moment. She told me I gave her pleasure; and I did not leave her until her women had closed the curtains, and the crowd had gone away. They departed with a sort of sadness, for it looked like a sacrifice, and she has continued to interest everybody in her. Your Majesty will laugh, perhaps, at what I have just said; but the blessing of the bed, the priests, the candles, the brilliant pomp, the beauty and youth of the Princess, in fine, the desire one has that she may be happy, — all these things taken together provoke more thought than laughter."

This etiquette which weighed upon royal families was a heavy burden, an excessive fatigue. For two days the Dauphiness had eaten nothing. "Her great fatigue is the cause of this," the Marshal wrote again to Augustus III.; "and I have told the King that if she could not have some rest she would fall ill. Indeed, I don't know how she can avoid it. I am completely knocked up with following her. It is so hot in all the apartments, what with the quantity of people and the candles in the evening, that it is enough to kill one. And besides that, her clothes

are so heavy that I don't know how she has been able to carry them. What is still more fatiguing are all these endless presentations; and she wishes to remember all the names, which is a terrible task to a mind incessantly occupied, moreover, in trying to please and show attentions. The other day the King made me take up her skirt which lay on a sofa. It weighed, at least, sixty pounds; not one of our cuirasses weighs as much. I don't know how the Princess could have remained on her feet eight or nine hours with that enormous weight."

Marie Josèphe knew how to make herself esteemed and loved. A courtier, who admired the graces and virtues of this good and beautiful Dauphiness, said: "Nobody ought to take a wife anywhere but in Saxony; and rather than dispense with a Saxon wife, when there are no more, I will make one out of porcelain." Marie Leczinska forgot the quarrels that had existed between the house of Saxony and her father for the throne of Poland. She became tenderly attached to her daughter-in-law, and showed her an almost maternal love.

The Dauphiness was delivered, September 13, 1751, of a son, who bore the title of Duke of Burgundy, and who died when nine years old, after long and horrible sufferings which he endured, a precocious Christian, with admirable courage. The Marquis de Pompignan wrote a biography of the little prince. Some years later, another child, likewise fated to undergo tortures, learned to read in this

book: it was that most innocent of victims, the future Louis XVII. "How did my little uncle manage to have already so much knowledge and goodness?" cried the compassionate child.

The Duke of Berry was born August 23, 1754; the Count of Provence, November 17, 1755; the Count of Artois, November 9, 1757. These three princes were to be called Louis XVI., Louis XVIII., and Charles X., — three names which on their first appearance affect the imagination with a nameless trouble, and transport it into an unprecedented world of revolutions and catastrophes.

Marie Josèphe of Saxony had eight children, five only of whom survived her; the three sons, who were all to reign, and two daughters, Madame Clotilde, who was Queen of Sardinia, and another whose mere name evokes the memory of the purest virtues, the profoundest piety, the most sublime sacrifices, the most heroic courage in sufferings, in prisons, on the scaffold: Madame Elisabeth.

The Dauphiness was a perfect wife and mother. Her goodness, sweetness, and charity rendered her at once lovable and worthy of veneration. . . . One finds consolation for the scandals of the court in contemplating a united household, a Christian household which set an example to France. Unhappily death was soon to break up this virtuous and holy life. The Dauphin, at the age of thirty-six, fell ill in November, 1765.

Had we not good reason to say, at the beginning of

this study, that epochs in appearance most scandalous and corrupt contain, like every other, treasures of edification? The admirable death of the son of Louis XV. is a proof of this verity. The agony of the Dauphin was about to commence.

"Thanks be to God," he said to his confessor, the Jesuit Callet, as soon as he saw him enter, "I have never been dazzled by the splendor of the throne to which I was summoned by my birth; I saw it only from the side of formidable duties by which it is accompanied, and the perils that surround it; I would desire to have a better soul, but I hope in the infinite mercy." Then, turning towards his sisters and his wife, the good Prince exclaimed: "I cannot tell you how glad I am to be the first to go; I shall be sorry to leave you, but I am well pleased not to remain behind you." The next day, November 13, the Archbishop of Rheims came to bring the sacraments. Louis XV. was kneeling at the threshold of the chamber, while the Duke of Orleans and the Prince of Condé approached the bed to hold the communion cloth. After the Mass the Dauphin said: "God has made me taste at this moment so sweet a consolation that I have never known one like it." And as the Queen was speaking of his recovery: "Ah, mamma!" he exclaimed with vivacity, "keep that hope for yourself, for my part I do not desire it at all."

The Prince, who had one day said, while looking at Paris from the terrace of the Château of Bellevue: "I am thinking of the delight that ought to be expe-

rienced by a sovereign in causing the happiness of so many people;" this truly exemplary Prince was taken, December 20, 1765, from the affection of a people, who honored his virtues and his sincere devotion. Nine days afterward, the Dauphiness wrote to her brother, Prince Xavier of Saxony: "The good God has willed that I should survive him for whom I would have given a thousand lives; I hope He will grant me the grace to employ the rest of my pilgrimage in preparing, by sincere penitence, to rejoin his soul in heaven, where I doubt not he is asking the same grace for me."

Marie Leczinska mourned bitterly for her son, who had always been so good, so tender, and respectful to her. The pious Queen was to undergo new trials. She surrounded her aged father with the most touching attentions, and though far away, busied herself with him as though she were by his side. He was at Nancy, and she had just sent him a wadded dressing-gown for the coming winter. It caught fire while Stanislas was sleeping in his armchair; always amiable and affectionate, he attempted to tranquillize his daughter by a note in which he wrote pleasantly: "What consoles me, daughter, is that I burn for you." This was the last letter Marie Leczinska was to receive from a father whom she cherished. King Stanislas breathed his last February 24, 1766. His death brought about, according to treaty stipulations, the definitive reunion of the duchies of Lorraine and Bar to France. As the Countess d'Armaillé has

said, this was Queen Marie's last gift to the land of her adoption.

Afflictions succeeded each other with deplorable rapidity. Marie Josèphe of Saxony died fifteen months after her husband, March 12, 1767, recommending her family to Marie Leczinska, who regretted her as much as if she had been her daughter. The Queen bowed to the decrees of Providence. Her soul remained strong, but her body was crushed by sorrow. "Give me back my children," she said, "and you will cure me."

XVI

THE DEATH OF MARIE LECZINSKA

AT the close of that last dialogue where, in the harbor of Ostia, under a starry sky, overlooking the limpid waves, she aspired to that life eternal which eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor the heart of man attained, Saint Monica said to her son: "My child, nothing any longer attaches me to earth. What should I do here? Why am I still here? I have realized all my hopes in this world. One thing there was for which I desired to sojourn awhile in this life, — it was to see thee a Christian before I died. God has given me that joy in over-measure, since I see thee despising all earthly felicity in order to serve Him. What have I to do here any longer?"

What Saint Monica said in the harbor of Ostia, Marie Leczinska could say in the palace of Versailles. She had inspired her children with Christian sentiments. Two of her daughters and her son had expired in the peace of the Lord. The four remaining daughters thought and lived like saints. Her task was accomplished. She thought of nothing now but dying.

The convent of the Carmelites of Compiègne had become her chosen refuge. It was there that, fleeing from grandeurs which had never dazzled her, she humbled herself, annihilated herself before the King of Kings, before Him who strengthens and consoles. This Queen to whom her son had said one day: "Do you know, mamma, you will end by quarrelling with Saint Teresa? Why do you want to be more fervent here than the most fervent Carmelites, and make still longer prayers than theirs?" This Queen, who would willingly have exchanged the royal mantle for a serge habit, had for her oratory a cell in no respect different from that of the nuns. She said she wanted to learn how to die to the world and to herself.

Madame de Campan, who knew the four last daughters of Louis XV. so well, thus describes the salutary influence which the Queen exercised over their destiny: "Mesdames had in their august mother, Marie Leczinska, the noblest model of all the pious and social virtues; by her eminent qualities and her modest dignity, this princess veiled the wrongs with which, but too unfortunately, one was authorized to reproach the King; and so long as she lived, she guarded for the court of Louis XV. that dignified and imposing aspect which alone maintains the respect due to power. The princesses, her daughters, were worthy of her; and if some few vile creatures tried to launch the shafts of calumny against them, they fell at once, repelled by the high

idea people entertained of the loftiness of their sentiments and the purity of their conduct."

The woman who had been able to preserve a remnant of decency in a corrupt society, and had thus saved the remnants of royal prestige, was surrounded by unmixed veneration. At this epoch, as at all others, one encountered types of honor and virtue, patriarchal and truly Christian existences, interiors which were sanctuaries. It will not do to judge the eighteenth century by the court and certain salons. Worthy people were still numerous, especially among the provincial nobility, the middle classes, and the people. In spite of Voltaire's attacks, in spite of the building of that Tower of Babel called the Encyclopedia, Christianity continued to be what it had been for so many centuries: the soul of France. The attempts of the philosophers to create a morality independent of religion failed miserably, and all good minds recognized that the Voltairian school was leading the nation into ruin.

The life of Marie Leczinska may be called the symbol of the religious and virtuous element. In the face of adultery, the pious sovereign had maintained the sacred rights of the family; in spite of his irregularities, Louis XV. would never have dared, like Louis XIV., to legitimate the children of his debaucheries and declare them eligible to the throne of France. The scandal was in the boudoir of the favorites, the edification by the hearth fire of the Queen.

As greatly as Madame de Pompadour was hated and despised, so greatly was Marie Leczinska loved and respected. Her arrival was a festival, her departure caused general sadness. "Is it not admirable," she wrote, "that I cannot leave Compiègne without seeing everybody crying? Sometimes I ask myself what I have done to all these people whom I do not know, to be so loved by them. They remember all my wishes." She gave away all she had, according to her lady of honor, the Maréchale de Mouchy, and when nothing was left, she sold her jewels. One year when the high price of bread had caused more than common distress, she pawned her precious stones and wore false ones. Her charity was as inexhaustible as her kindness. She had the virtues of a woman of the middle classes, the manners of a great lady, the dignity of a queen. The resignation with which she endured her sorrows inspired in every one a sympathy blended with respectful compassion. Public opinion paid her homage, envy and slander were silent in her presence. Even the philosophers honored her.

In a changing epoch, when all minds and hearts were in disorder, she preserved three qualities which are rare in courts, — honesty, tact, and good sense. There was nothing gloomy or morose about her virtue. Her sweet, agreeable devotion recalled that of Saint Francis de Sales, the most lovable of all the saints. She had the gift of making herself beloved by a word, a smile. As has been remarked by the

Countess d'Armaillé, there was hardly a salon in France toward the close of the last century, in which one could not meet some old lady always ready to tell about her presentation at Versailles, and to become affected in reciting the compliments which the good Queen Marie had paid her on that memorable evening. Affable by nature and principle, indulgent by instinct and reasoned conviction, Marie Leczinska was distinguished among all the women of the court by a quality which is a force and a charm, a quality still more necessary to sovereigns than to private persons, — benevolence.

When she fell ill, the emotion was general. Every Frenchman entertained for her the sentiments of a brother or a sister. The people besieged the doors of the château of Versailles to get tidings of her. Sometimes Louis XV. gave these himself. The churches of Paris and the provinces were crowded with people praying for the good Queen.

The final moment was drawing near. The four daughters of Marie Leczinska spent the last nights at their mother's bedside with a devotion which made them resemble Sisters of Charity. At the moment when the death struggle was about to begin, Louis XV. kneeled beside his wife's bed, and said to her, weeping: "Here are our daughters whom I present to you." A Christian, the mother understood what these words implied; and raising her eyes to heaven, she gave her children her last blessing.

It is an hour of torture and anguish, a doleful

hour, an hour heart-rending above all, when one loses a cherished mother. The grief borders on stupor. One feels one's self the sport of a bad dream. One cannot grow accustomed to so horrible a thought. Those holy, venerable hands will never again be laid in blessing on your head! Those lips whence issued counsels so wise, words so affectionate, are closed forever! That heart, so warm, so loving, is cold; it beats no more. Again you call to your mother; you call, and for the first time, alas! she does not answer you. Then, all she has done for you, your childhood, your youth, your whole life, rises up before you. Long years of devotion, of sacrifices and tenderness, are concentrated in a single minute. The heart, invaded by memories as by a rising tide, overflows, and you burst into sobs. Oh! woe to him who at this fatal moment believes that all ends here below! Woe to him who has not the conviction that the dead woman is in heaven, that she is watching over her children; that they can still love and implore her; that she will always be their strength, their consoler, their good angel! But happy in the midst of tears, happy amid the most cruel trials, the Christians who then recall the prayer of Saint Louis, lamenting his mother, Blanche of Castile: "I return thee thanks, O my God! Thou hadst lent me a good, an incomparable, mother; but I know well she was not mine! Now, Lord, thou hast withdrawn her to thyself. . . . Thus has thy Providence determined. It is true that I cherished her beyond all

creatures in the world. . . . Nevertheless, since thou hast thus ordained, may thine adorable will be done! My God! may thy holy name be blessed forever!"

Marie Leczinska died in angelic tranquillity. She was still trying to say her rosary, when death interrupted on earth the prayer which the holy woman was about to resume in heaven. These beautiful words of Massillon were realized for the pious Queen: "The soul of the just, during the days of their mortal life, dare not gaze fixedly upon the profundity of God's judgments; they work out their salvation with fear and trembling, they shudder at the bare thought of that terrible future where the just themselves will hardly be saved, if they are judged without mercy; but on the bed of death, ah! the God of peace, who manifests Himself, calms their agitations; their fears cease of a sudden and are changed into a sweet hope, their dying eyes pierce the cloud of mortality which still environs them, and see that immortal country after which they have sighed so long, and where they have always dwelt in spirit." Oh! you who have seen a saintly mother die, you who have in your hearts a regret and an expectation, do not forget!

It was the 24th of June, 1768, when Marie Leczinska yielded her last breath. The very day before she had entered her sixty-eighth year. Her reign had lasted forty-three years, and during that long period she had caused no tears to flow but those of joy and gratitude. Her women, her servants, her poor, collected the least scraps of her clothing to pre-

serve as relics. Her mortal remains, exposed for eight days on a bed of state, was the object of a real cult on the part of the people. The Archbishop of Troyes preached her funeral sermon. "Pontiff of the living God," said he, addressing himself to the Archbishop of Paris, "fear not to offer above her tomb an incense which may one day be offered above her altars." Compare this life and death with those of the Marquise de Pompadour, if you wish to know what vice is, and what is virtue.

Marie Leczinska is the last queen who has ended her days upon the throne of France. The women, who for now a century have worn the royal or imperial crown in our unhappy and inconstant land, have all been the innocent victims of the Revolution and the caprices of fate. One perished an august martyr on the scaffold; another died at the moment of the invasion, her heart broken by the afflictions of her vanquished country. A third faded away almost forgotten in the little duchy given her in exchange for the finest empire of the world. A fourth died holily in a foreign land, regretting perhaps that she had been Queen; and there is one who, at this very moment, is sadly rewarded for her charity and courage, her virtue and her patriotism. To-day, above all, might a Bossuet say before Versailles abandoned or the Tuileries in ruins: *Et nunc, reges intelligite! Erudimini, que judicatis terram!* And now, O Kings, comprehend! Be instructed, O ye who judge the earth!

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